Diversity and Inclusion: Examining the Lived Experiences of LGBTQ Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt

Steven Jones

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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: EXAMINING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ STUDENTS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES (HBCUs) IN THE BIBLE BELT

by

Steven J. Jones

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School, the College of Education and Human Sciences and the School of Education at The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the twentieth century, the Gay Rights Movement has gained momentum as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) individuals have fought for civil equality and social acceptance. However, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been slow to adapt, implement, and effect change that improves the quality of education for LGBTQ students. Strong religious beliefs derived from the church; especially in the South, may be the connection to understanding why homosexuality isn’t vastly accepted or celebrated in the Black Community and at HBCUs; particularly, in the Bible Belt.

Thus, this phenomenological qualitative study, guided by the theory of care framework, explores the lived experiences of 10 LGBTQ students at HBCUs in the Bible Belt. Campus resources, programs, and activities in support of a diverse and inclusive environment wherein LGBTQ students are supported provide powerful instruments for change within the higher education environment. Participants are interviewed to gain in-depth knowledge of their experiences as LGBTQ students in a HBCU campus climate to improve college policies, procedures, and practices toward LGBTQ students.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my dissertation committee, thank you for your commitment, dedication, and patience throughout this journey. I could not have accomplished this significant milestone without your guidance and support. To my dissertation chair, Dr. Foster, thank you for everything. Thank you for being patient with me but continuously pushing me to completion. I am forever thankful. To the USM faculty whom I have had the pleasure of being your student, thank you sincerely for your knowledge and wisdom. I am reassured every day in my career that I made the right choice in selecting The University of Southern Mississippi as my choice for pursuing a doctoral degree. The rigor you have instilled into this program is unmatchable and I hope that my peers appreciate it as much as I have. I am confident that I am ready to take the next step in my professional career – to pursue higher ranks – because of the education I have received at USM. Thank you.
DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ for giving me the strength to keep pushing forward; for placing important individuals in my life who have loved me unconditionally; and for giving me wonderful mentors who have continued to motivate and guide me through my professional career. Without each of them, my journey would not be complete. They have supported me financially, emotionally, spiritually, and physically when I felt I had nothing left to give. I am forever grateful for them.

To my mother, Charlene, who has inspired me to work hard and take nothing for granted, I dedicate this dissertation to you. I have watched you through the years work tirelessly to provide better opportunities for me and my siblings. You are a warrior who has constantly shown me the importance of never giving up. Now, more than ever, I see your perseverance – it’s truly inspiring. I will cherish you always.

To the LGBTQ community, this dissertation is for you. I pray that this dissertation continues to spark conversations among higher education professionals – particularly at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the South – so that progress can continue to form for the next generation of LGBTQ students who seek the HBCU experience. I pray that HBCUs will be inspired by this dissertation to either implement LGBTQ initiatives or further enhance LGBTQ initiatives that address the dire needs of the LGBTQ community whereby guaranteeing them a high-quality education in a safe and conducive to learning environment.

To the LGBTQ students, presently enrolled in a college or university, I dedicate this dissertation to you. I hope you find reassurance in knowing that there are people who
care, who listen, who sympathize, and who advocate for you and every LGBTQ college student who follows in your footsteps. I hope this dissertation gives you the strength to finish your college journey.

To the LGBTQ students who have dropped out of college because you felt you could no longer endure the unequal treatment; the homophobic slurs and comments; the unwelcoming campus and classroom climate; the awful discrimination and harassment; this dissertation is for you. I pray that you find courage, peace, and strength in the mist of it all to re-enroll in college and successfully finish the educational journey you have begun. I further hope that this dissertation gives you the reassurance in knowing that someone cares, someone is listening, someone is sympathizing, and someone is advocating for you.

To the LGBTQ college faculty, staff, and administrators, this dissertation is dedicated to you. I pray you find strength in knowing that your story, your worries, your feelings, and your compressed thoughts are being spoken in hopes of providing a better working environment for you and your LGBTQ counterparts who work alongside you. I further hope that this dissertation will give you the confidence to continue advocating for your students – “all” of your students so they may have a wonderful college experience.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to the countless LGBTQ organizations, advocates, lawyers, elected officials, and more – locally, regionally, and nationally – that work to advance protections for the LGBTQ community and every citizen of the United States of America. I thank you for your contributions. May God bless you all.
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<td><strong>HBCU</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HBCUs</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LGBT</strong></td>
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CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century, the Gay Rights Movement has gained momentum as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) individuals have fought for civil equality and social acceptance. From the foundational gay-liberation Greenwich Village Stonewall Riot of 1969 to the U.S. military’s Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) policy; to the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and the California-based same-sex marriage Proposition 8; from the civil-union litigation of Windsor v. United States to the openly gay marriage support of a sitting U.S. President (Barack Obama); the Gay Rights Movement has facilitated social progressivism for many including LGBTQ college students as well as the institutions of higher learning that serve them. Fast-forward to today, the Equality Act which aims to amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include protections for the LGBTQ population was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 17, 2019. The bill was sent to the U.S. Senate on May 20, 2019 where it remains under consideration to date. The passing of this legislation by the U.S. House of Representatives was a major milestone in the history of the Gay Rights Movement. The U.S. Supreme Court made the victory greater on June 15, 2020 when the Court ruled that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects gay and transgender workers from workplace discrimination. However, there is still work to do—especially in the African American community and at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) where homophobia remains palpably evident (Squire & Mobley, 2014).

Historically, HBCUs have served as symbols of hope for many African American students who seek a brighter academic and social/career future. Patton (2011) opined that these institutions are lauded for providing students who might not have otherwise been
able to pursue higher education with a supportive and caring environment. Furthermore, Williams (2014), George Mwangi (2016), and Lenning (2017) argue that African American students feel more connected to HBCU institutions as opposed to non-HBCU institutions. According to Ford (2015), HBCUs are unique and distinctive from other institutions of higher learning, including predominately White institutions (PWIs). Researchers like Ford (2015) describe HBCUs as nurturing and affirming Black students in general, who, as a result, feel a deep connection to the parent institution, possess higher levels of engagement, and have stronger self-perceptions of personal worth than their peers attending non-HBCUs. Notwithstanding, some researchers, such as Ford (2015), would suggest that HBCUs have failed to provide a diverse and inclusive environment for LGBTQ students and that a majority of LGBTQ African Americans choose not to attend HBCUs. A great number of those who decide to attend are not open about their sexuality within the HBCU community due to the highly conservative nature of the institution as it relates to LGBTQ issues. For example, Ford (2015) notes that “HBCUs have been characterized as possessing environments in which students are encouraged either implicitly or explicitly to conceal their gay identity because homosexuality is deemed inconsistent with the mission of many such institutions” (p.354). Lee (2015) argues that, historically, HBCUs have not been the best place for LGBTQ individuals and HBCUs have responded to this population of students at a slower rate – putting HBCUs at a disadvantage competitively to other institutions who have done more to support LGBTQ students. Between 2002 and 2007, reports surfaced of verbal and physical assaults of Black gay male students and Black male students perceived to be gay at such HBCUs as Central State University, Hampton University,
Howard University, Morehouse College, and Johnson C. Smith University (Ford, 2015). Lenning (2017) states, “HBCUs are notoriously perceived as unwelcoming towards LGBTQ students, and are considerably behind predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in regards to providing supportive and affirming environments” (p. 283). Thus, what LGBTQ African American students perceive as a negative HBCU environment hinders them from experiencing a healthy, accepting campus climate resonant of the historical mission of “inclusion” and “protection” that so many HBCUs were founded upon.

Preliminary History of LGBTQ Affairs at HBCUs

As has been explained by Ford (2015), Lee (2015), and Lenning (2017), a negative campus climate does not attract potential students and does little to retain them. In fact, a negative campus climate impedes students’ ability to have the same college experience as other students who do not identify as LGBTQ. That is, LGBTQ students are unable to fully take advantage of everything college has to offer including but not limited to social and network opportunities and openly dating and showing affection for their partners (expressing their love for one another without fear of retaliation). In essence, they are unable to fully enjoy their college experience. Taylor (2015) explains that hostile and negative higher education climates (both HBCU and non-HBCU) towards LGBTQ students is evident based on the testimony of LGBTQ students who have witnessed it first-hand. When considering the above, there is a good argument that the campus climate at HBCUs (as well as some non-HBCUs) is not conducive to learning for all students. For example, Lenning (2017) notes that not all students attending HBCUs receive equal levels of support – that LGBTQ students face unique challenges related to the culture and campus climate of HBCUs, and they struggle to find spaces that affirm
their sexual and/or gender identities. In Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuir’s (2016) study, LGBTQ students spoke about the campus climate as primarily one of silence.

Additionally, research suggests that a negative campus climate has led to anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, poor academic performance and more. On the campuses of both HBCUs and PWIs, African American gay and bisexual men face varying degrees of psychological challenges (Goode-Cross & Tager, 2011). It is important to note that campus climate is central to psychological development, particularly given the homophobia and heterosexism latent in campus environments (Patton, 2011). It is a known fact that LGBTQ students continue to experience discrimination daily on college campuses around the world; and in some cases, the discrimination these students [LGBTQ students] endure leads to mental and physical harm –anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and poor academic achievement. Dessel and Goodman (2017) conclude that queer discrimination, including but not limited to LGBT jokes and slurs, verbal harassment and threats, unfair treatment, physical attacks, and other mistreatment, on college campus occurs throughout the country and that such behaviors can yield increased risk of negative outcomes, including but not limited to mental and physical health issues and lower academic engagement and performance.

In addition, Choi et al. (2013) explains that accruing data shows that mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, panic disorder, psychological distress, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideation to the effects of discrimination, is more widespread amongst sexual minorities than among heterosexuals.

Further, a negative campus climate can harm the reputation of the institution which could also affect growth [enrollment]. Research suggests that the campus climate
can be the determining factor as to whether or not a student decides to enroll. For instance, Squire and Mobley (2015) note that the perceived campus climate may play a role in the types of institutions that African American students ultimately applied to.

Statement of the Problem

Mitchell and Fries (2016), suggest that homosexuality has always been a hot topic, but recently it came to the forefront on three occasions:

“The first occasion was in 2012 when American president Barack Obama openly supported gay marriages as part of his political campaign. The second was in 2012 and 2014 when pro athletes Jason Collins (NBA) and Michael Sam (NFL) publicly announced that they were gay. The third occasion was in 2014 when Dan Cathy, the chief operating officer of the American food chain Chick-fil-A publicly announced that he opposed same-sex marriages” (p.12).

Notwithstanding all of the public attraction, and the advancement of gay rights around the world, college and universities, particularly, Historically Black College and Universities (HBCUs), have moved slowly to advance policies, procedures, and practices that make their college campuses more diverse and inclusive to LGBTQ students - especially in the Bible Belt where more than a third of all LGBTQ people in the United States reside (Strauss, 2016).

Further, surprisingly, there is limited research on LGBTQ students (and/or LGBTQ students and HBCUs) which leaves higher education leaders with little direction as to how to advance LGBTQ policies and practices that address LGBTQ students’ needs (Pitcher et al. 2018). Thus, it is important to highlight the experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs so that more attention can be drawn to this underserved population of
students who seek, and deserve, equal treatment under the law. As noted above, without further research into the matter, higher education professionals are unable to identify the needs of the LGBTQ students they seek to serve.

Additionally, more in-depth research can assist HBCUs with assessments and evaluations into their current policies, procedures, and practices as well as provide a blueprint for creativity and strategic direction aimed at improving equity and inclusion for the LGBTQ student population. Lastly, further research is warranted to examine ways to enhance the campus climate and promote an environment conducive to learning for all students. Exploratory research will highlight the LGBTQ students’ experiences on HBCU campuses. Ford’s (2015) research revealed that a majority of surveyed LGBT people of color believed that their racial and ethnic communities are disapproving of the open practice of homosexuality. Thus, future research is warranted to further explore homophobia within the African American community and explore ways for advancing social tolerance (even within the religious sanctuary).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of LGBTQ college students at HBCUs in the Bible Belt in an effort to improve the college life experience of LGBTQ students.

Theoretical Framework

Higher education practitioners have a duty to educate, guide, and protect the students they serve. It is essential that they show compassion and care for their students so that they [students] may reach their full potential. For these reasons, and more, the theory of care will be explored for the purposes of this study. According to Glowacki-
Dudka et al. (2018), Nel Noddings believes care in education is a moral responsibility towards students, regardless of subject matter or field of discovery. Educators can demonstrate intentional care by being attentive and receptive, listening, responding to expressed or inferred needs, conscientiously planning, and leading with empathy.

Noddings (2002) uses five key components to define her theory of care: framing care through behavior, talking about the act of caring, practicing care for one another, reflecting on those acts, and affirming and encouraging the best in each other. The framework of care focuses on building a learning community, open communication, critical reflection, equality, and democracy. The learning community provides an immediate context for caring to occur in educational programs (Noddings, 2002). Open communication is all about establishing trust amongst one another whereby students are more willing to share their experiences and stories with others. Further, the environment presents an opportunity where students are more like-minded and able to truly listen, understand, and empathize with others (Glowacki-Dudka et al., 2018).

Glowacki-Dudka et al. (2018) declares compassionate educators can create a caring educational experience in diverse settings, and to implement such framework requires acknowledging existing and latent learner intentions, then fulfilling any anticipated expectations through group- and topic-focused activities. In essence, as noted above, educators who are compassionate about their students will provide an opportunity wherein all students can succeed. The theory of care strictly defines the higher education practitioner’s role in an environment where LGBTQ students do not feel included or equal – change the landscape, advocate, educate, protect, and serve the LGBTQ student
with the same level of compassion, respect, and “care” as one provides to their counterparts [heterosexuals].

Noddings suggested that schools should be environments where human development is paramount even above academic development (Noddings, 2006). Noddings defines the classroom as a place of cohabitation between teachers and learners, a place where students feel safe to express questions (Noddings, 2006). More importantly, the theory of care tells practitioners that homophobia has no place on campus grounds and “all” students including LGBTQ students, should be treated with care and compassion.

Research Questions

In light of the above, this study seeks to answer the following questions from the perspective of LGBTQ students: (1) How does the selected LGBTQ students perceive the HBCU college experience; and (2) what can HBCU institutions do to create a more diverse and inclusive environment where LGBTQ students feel safe and valued.

Research Design

A phenomenological research approach will be used in this study. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “phenomenologists are interested in our ‘lived experience’. Phenomenology is the way of access to the world as we experience it pre-reflectively. Pre-reflective experience is the ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence. The reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, ‘I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that.’ A phenomenological approach is well-suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (p. 26).
Alase (2017) states that it is the researcher’s role and responsibility to investigate and interpret the impact of the research subject-matter on the ‘lived experiences’ of the research participants; and, the uniqueness and suitability to investigate and interpret the “lived experiences” of the research participants makes it appropriate for qualitative researchers to elect and utilize the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research tradition.

More specifically, the unique workings of the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that reaffirms it as the best research approach for this study include the following:

According to Smith and Osborn (2015), IPA recognizes that this research approach is an interpretative endeavor because humans are sense-making organisms. Therefore, IPA affords the researcher an opportunity to try to make sense out of the experience; to try to make sense of what is happening to the study. Smith and Osborn (2015) describes IPA as, “idiographic in its commitment to examining the detailed experience of each case in turn, prior to the move to more general claims” (p. 41).

Research suggest that IPA is particularly attractive because of its commitment to explore, describe, interpret, and situate the participants’ sense making of their experience, and its structured approach and qualitative orientation seems to appeal to varies disciplines including but not limited to healthcare, human, and social research. According to Tuffour (2017), IPA has two primary aims: (1) to look in detail at how someone makes sense of life experiences, and (2) to give detailed interpretation of the account to understand the experience.
Significance of the Study

As noted above, the last decade of the twentieth century, colleges and universities have invested time and attention to researching various ways to implement and/or improve diversity and inclusion efforts on campus. Notwithstanding, historically black colleges and universities have moved slowly to implement diversity and inclusion plans that target the LGBTQ student population. As such, LGBTQ students fail to identify or feel a sense of belonging at HBCU institutions – resulting in a majority of LGBTQ students enrolling in non-HBCU institutions.

Further, as noted above, HBCUs have been slow to respond to the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities. In fact, some HBCUs are known for having unsupportive climates for students identifying as LGBT (Harper & Gasman, 2008). However, as noted in Palmer, Shorette, & Gasman (2015), some HBCUs’ attitudes toward their LGBT populations are changing rapidly, as highlighted by these examples: (1) Howard University has had an on-campus support organization for gay and lesbian students since 1980; (2) Spelman College has been an exemplar among HBCUs, sponsoring a national conference in 2011 on HBCUs and LGBT issues; (3) Bowie State University opened its Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Allies Resource Center in 2012; (4) Morehouse College offered its first LGBT course in 2013. The course focused on Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender history and was taught by a Yale faculty member via Skype.

In light of above, this study will document LGBTQ students’ college experiences at three public HBCUs in Mississippi. Further, the study will provide recommendations
from the LGBTQ students’ perspective as to what HBCU institutions can do to improve campus climate, equity, and inclusion for LGBTQ college students.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research, the following definitions apply:

*Bible Belt:* A familiar label associated with religion in the South, was coined by journalist H.L. Mencken following his coverage of the Scopes “monkey” trial in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925. The Bible Belt region today stretches from northern Texas to western North Carolina, and from Mississippi north to Kentucky. The term generally pertains to a region associated with fundamentalist Protestantism, puritanical mores and populated by adherents to denominations which believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible (Brunn, Webster, & Archer, 2011).

*Campus Climate:* The prevailing standards, behaviors, and attitudes of people on campus, which are shaped by access and retention, research and scholarship, curriculum, group relations, university policies, and external relations (Rankin & Reason, 2008 as cited in Vaccaro, 2012).

*Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA):* Defines marriage as between a man and woman and permits individual states the right to not recognize same-sex relationships that are considered as marriage in another state (Hall, 2013).

*Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT):* Introduced by President Bill Clinton in 1993, prevented commanders from asking military personnel about their sexual orientation, but it barred openly lesbian, gay and bisexual Americans from serving in the armed forces (Hall, 2013).
Equality Act: A bill that would amend the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other civil rights laws to include sexual orientation and gender identity as protected characteristics. The bill passed in the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote 263-173 on May 17, 2019 and remains under consideration in the U.S. Senate to date (Killough, 2019).

Gay Rights Movement: Developed in higher education in the late 1960s as student groups emerged on campus that fought for rights of the LGBTQ community and to end the systematic marginalization they faced within the government, legal system, health care system, and religion (Marine, 2011; McRuer, 2002; as cited in Broadhurst et al., 2018).

Gay Straight Alliance: A school-based extracurricular group that provides a setting for LGBTQ students and their peer allies to receive support, socialize with one another, learn about LGBTQ issues, and advocate for equity and justice in schools (Poteat, 2017).

Heterosexism: An ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any nonheterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community. It operates principally by rendering homosexuality invisible and, when this fails, by trivializing, repressing, or stigmatizing it (Herek, 1990 as cited in Wickens & Sandlin, 2010).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) – A federally defined classification of postsecondary institutions whose principal mission was, and is, to promote the education of Black Americans (Lundy-Wagner & Gasman; 2011; Palmer & Wood, 2010; as cited in Johnson & McGowan, 2017).
**Homophobia:** Commonly described as prejudice against individuals based on nonheterosexual orientation, and is characterized as intense fear or hatred of those who desire individuals of the same gender (West, 2004 as cited in Wickens & Sandlin, 2010).

**Homosexual:** Defined as having sexual attraction to the same sex (Mitchell & Fries, 2016).

**Queer:** A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Often used interchangeably with “LGBTQ” (Human Rights Campaign, 2020).

**Assumptions**

This study’s data was collected through one-on-one interviews with participants. It was assumed that the information each participant provided was accurate, truthful, and provided to the best of their knowledge.

**Delimitations**

The chosen topic for this study is a delimitation in and of itself. LGBTQ students and HBCUs, two topics, collectively, that have generated minimum research and/or findings. The target population for this study only includes LGBTQ college students from selected “public” HBCUs in the state of Mississippi; therefore, the voices of LGBTQ students at the remaining public HBCUs, and those from the private HBCUs, in Mississippi such as Alcorn State University, Hinds Community College – Utica Campus, Tougaloo College and Rust College were not be studied. Additionally, HBCUs located in other states were not studied.

**Limitations**

The study is limited to selected public HBCUs in the state of Mississippi; however, the Bible Belt encompasses several states within the Midwest and Southeast
region of the United States. Mississippi’s community college system, which encompasses two locations designated as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Coahoma Community College and Hinds Community College – Utica Campus, has the oldest state-wide system of public two-year colleges in the United State of America. Further, both Jackson State University and Mississippi Valley State University are unique institutions within the state’s four-year college system. While Jackson State was originally founded as Natchez Seminary in 1877 by the American Baptist Home Mission Society as an institution for the moral, religious and intellectual improvement of Christian leaders of the colored people of Mississippi and the neighboring states (Jackson State University, 2020), Mississippi Valley State is known as the state’s youngest HBCU, founded in 1946 (Mississippi Valley State University, 2020). The study is limited by the number of students who self-identify as LGBTQ at HBCUs in Mississippi. As a result, the study may be limited by the number of participants who are openly gay and willing to serve as a participant. The study is further limited by the minimum resources available at HBCUs that aim to support LGBTQ issues – such as a Gay Straight Alliance.

Summary

This study examined the experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black College and Universities in the state of Mississippi (a Bible Belt State) and documented those experiences in such a way that higher education practitioners can reflect, develop, and implement policies, procedures, and practices that will change the landscape and campus climate of HBCU institutions. Particularly, the findings may assist higher education professionals in understanding the college experience of LGBTQ students and
identify the negative components that hinder LGBTQ students from being successful (or fully capable of enjoying the college experience from a holistic viewpoint).

Moreover, practitioners will gain vital information that will reveal how far their HBCU institutions have come in promoting and implementing equity and inclusion on the college campus. They will also gain knowledge of where their strengths and weaknesses are insofar as LGBTQ-related issues. Further, the documented experiences of LGBTQ students will further emphasize the importance of having available campus resources to aid LGBTQ students in overcoming homophobic acts, suppression, and mental health issues associated with LGBTQ victimization.

The study aims to contribute to the literature regarding LGBTQ college students at HBCU institutions. Specifically, the study will provide valuable information regarding African American students, HBCUs, and the Bible Belt as it relates to equality and social tolerance. The experiences of the students in the study may validate what has already been documented in the literature regarding homophobic acts, discrimination, harassment, and inequality of HBCU institutions as well as highlight the need for positive changes.

Lastly, the study may dispute the literature and provide a more positive outcome insofar as LGBTQ relations on HBCU campuses. Because there is research to suggest that HBCUs are doing more to address LGBTQ students, the experiences of the participants in this study may affirm HBCUs’ commitment to improving the quality of education for LGBTQ students and set a different path towards equity and inclusion.
CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

The Gay Rights Movement

The Stonewall riot was a pivotal moment in the history of the United States. This anti-gay tactic by law enforcement and local government officials contributed to the birth of the “Gay Rights Movement.” In fact, some would argue that the 1969 Stonewall riot in New York City was the beginning of the Gay Rights Movement while others would say that the Stonewall riot was more than a movement – it was freedom for the oppressed LGBTQ community. As noted by Poindexter (1997):

On Friday, June 27, 1969, shortly before midnight, New York City detectives raided the Stonewall Inn, a small gay bar in Greenwich Village. As part of his platform for re-election during the mayoral campaign, Mayor John Lindsay had agreed to another police crackdown on gay bars. At that time, the patrons of the Stonewall Inn tended to be young men of color; many were also transvestites or runaways. This routine raid did not go smoothly because the crowd did not behave in the usual passive manner. Rather, the patrons of the bar erupted in violence. Rioting continued into the next three nights. Crowds gathered constantly to watch and participate. The anger was evidently not just about that night or that arrest because cries of “Gay Power” were frequently heard. Word of the disruption spread quickly through the mainstream media and gay press, and the modern gay rights movement in the United States was born (p. 607). “The Stonewall riot has become a powerful symbol for emancipation and should continue to be celebrated as such. Yet it should be appreciated in its full meaning:
It was not actually the beginning of the modern gay rights movement; rather, it was a defining moment in a long, hard struggle” (p. 614).

Since the Stonewall riot, the United States has made progress towards improving the lives of the LGBTQ community though much work still needs to be done. Rhodes et al. (2013) declares, though the past decade has shown progress for LGBTQ people/rights in the United States, the population remains underserved. Fast forwarding to the last few years, gay right activists and organizations have focused on obtaining marriage equality for same-sex couples. Most recently, two landmark rulings have been handed down by the United States Supreme Court. These landmark rulings include the United States v. Windsor, 570 U.S. 744 (2013) wherein the Court held that Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment by restricting federal interpretation of “marriage” and “spouse” to apply only to opposite-sex unions, and Obergefell v. Hodges, 576 U.S. 644 (2015) wherein the Court ruled that same-sex couples should have the right to marry on the same terms and conditions as their opposite-sex counterparts thereby establishing same-sex marriage legal throughout the United States. Further, the United States Supreme Court ruled on June 15, 2020, in the landmark case Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia, 140 S. Ct. 1731 (2020), to extend workplace protections to gay and transgender workers prompting the most recent amendment to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Homophobia and the African American Community

Research suggests that a majority of the world views homosexuality as abnormal and heterosexism as the norm. For example, Majied (2010) defines heterosexism as the norm for majority of the world and all other relationships or expressions as abnormal or
in contrast to the norm. As a society, research suggests (Majied, 2010), parents tend to instill those same views into their children - making sure they [children] know that homosexuality is not normal, not good, and not acceptable. Particularly, in the Bible Belt where Christianity is prominent, children are taught that homosexuality is not God-like, an abomination, or sin. These same views exist in schools, colleges, and universities worldwide. That is, LGBTQ students are sometimes victims of homophobic acts. For example, Majied (2010) takes note of a study wherein data revealed that 80% of students of color reported hearing homophobic remarks in school and 60% reported being verbally harassed because of their gender expression; 33% of African American students reported having been subject to physical violence in school due to their sexual orientation. More importantly, only 38% of African American students who experienced homophobia reported their incidents, and of those students who did report the homophobic acts, the majority felt the issues were not effectively addressed by those in authority.

Additionally, research reveals that African American students who identify as LGBTQ typically avoid being open about their sexuality. They may often times find it difficult to merge their sexual orientation and black identity together causing them to feel alienated from the LGBTQ community (Majied, 2010).

Homophobia has been linked to mental health issues. LGBTQ students suffer from anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, and more. According to Majied (2010), LGBTQ students who encountered higher frequencies of homophobia and who perceived the least positive school climate reported the highest levels of depression and suicidal thoughts which also resulted in the highest use of alcohol and marijuana.
Research continues to show that LGBTQ students do not feel safe at school as a result of the large number of LGBTQ students who suffer bullying and homophobic acts (Kolbert et al., 2018). A nationwide survey showed 75% of LGBT students reported verbal harassment (including threats of violence), 74% expressed being verbally harassed related specifically to their gender expression, 49% indicated being victimized through various forms of cyberbullying, and 36% described being physically harassed. In fact, researchers suggested that victimization was “normal” in the lives of LGBTQ students (Kolbert et al., 2018).

Religion, the African American Community, and Their Stance on Homosexuality

For many pioneers of the Civil Right Movement, names such as the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Coretta Scott King comes to mind when thinking of where HBCUs derive from given that many HBCUs were founded by religious organizations, including the Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal (AME), Catholic, and Presbyterian churches (Mobley and Johnson, 2015). According to Walker and Longmire-Avital (2013), religion is a strong tenet of the Black community and has been considered a pillar of the Black community. Historically, religious faith and religious communities have been the cornerstone of moral and value development for Black Americans. There is evidence to imply that it is because of their faith that a majority of Black Americans condemn homosexuality which has also trickled over into the practices at a majority of HBCUs (Mobley & Johnson, 2015). That is, a majority of Black Americans view homosexuality as “wrong.” As a result, those, Black Americans, who work in higher education, particularly at HBCUs, interact, engage, support, and ultimately carry out their job duties
in the same light – negatively effecting how LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff are treated.

HBCUs have a rich history of being at the forefront and prominently championing controversial issues within American society, internationally, and in numerous Black communities (Mobley & Johnson, 2015); however, a majority of HBCUs have continued to avoid addressing acceptance and inclusiveness for LGBTQ students. Some researchers suggest that, because of their religious faith, the Black community finds it hard to accept homosexuals while others go further to say that the Black community is downright homophobic. For example, Barnes’ (2013) research highlights Black men who regularly attended church tend to be more homophobic than those who attended less frequently. Further, research indicates that as a whole, Blacks express disapproval of homosexuality more strongly than Whites (Ford, 2015); Blacks are more likely than Whites to show negative sentiment toward homosexual behavior (Mitchell & Fries, 2016); and Blacks, more so than any other racial group, overwhelmingly voted in favor of Proposition 8 known informally as Prop 8 – a state constitutional amendment created by opponents of same-sex marriage in California. (Literte & Hodge, 2012). The research is clear – homophobia practices remain in the Black community. Buttaro and Battle (2012) argued that homophobia within the black community creates situations wherein the sexual identity of black LGBTs as well as the overall public health of the community is affected.

Research continues to suggest that Christianity is the dominant religion (Brunn, Webster, & Archer, 2011) and traditionally, the religion of Christianity has supported heterosexuality over any variant form of intimate relationship including homosexuality or bisexuality (Nkosi & Masson, 2017) - this definitely holds true for people living in the
Bible Belt or the South. In the United States the term, “Bible Belt” generally pertains to a region associated with fundamentalist Protestantism, puritanical mores and populated by adherents to denominations which believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. The Bible Belt region today stretches from northern Texas to western North Carolina, and from Mississippi North to Kentucky (Brunn, Webster, & Archer, 2011). According to Tweedie (1978), the Bible Belt is viewed in terms of numerical concentration of the audience for religious television. People residing in the Bible Belt have continued to reject the notion that LGBTQ people deserve equal rights under the law. For example, surprisingly, research reveals that the majority of LGBTQ people live in the South; yet not a single Southern state has passed an employment non-discrimination law to protect LGBTQ people at work (Strauss, 2016).

Research has well-documented religion as persuading attitudes about LGBTQ individuals. Dessel et al. (2016) argues that further studies of college students show frequent attendance at religious services often projected increased sexual prejudice and less support for civil rights for LGB people; particularly true for African Americans, with heterosexism in the Black church continuing to be an area of significant concern. These findings further demonstrate that homophobia and heterosexism in the Black community, and more specifically in the Christian Black communities remain prevalent.

The Historically Black College and University (HBCU)

According to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2009), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) date back to 1837 when philanthropist Richard Humphrey bequeathed one-tenth of his estate – about $10,000 – to help his Quaker community design and establish a school in Philadelphia to educate the
African American race. As a result of Humphrey’s generous donation, the Institute for Colored Youth became the first HBCU in the nation serving the Philadelphia community until 1902 when it moved to a farm outside the city and became what we know of today as Cheyney University (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev., 2009).

In addition to Cheyney University, only two other HBCUs existed prior to the Civil War – Lincoln University in Chester County, Pennsylvania (which was renamed Lincoln University in 1866) and Ohio’s Wilberforce University that opened in 1856. African Americans began to seek higher education opportunities following the abolishment of slavery in 1865. HBCUs were the primary institutions to educate former slaves during this time; however, they lacked financial support to carry out their mission (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev., 2009). For example, in 1862, the Morrill Land-Grant Act provided federal lands to the states specifically to opening colleges and universities, but only one HBCU, Alcorn State University, was included in the program. It was three decades before the second Morrill Land-Grant Act became law in 1890 and it specified that states using federal land-grant funds had to open their college doors to both blacks and whites or set aside money for segregated black colleges. Sixteen HBCUs received land grants as a result of that legislation (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev., 2009).

Further, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2009), there has been a number of legislative initiatives and judicial decisions that have helped to strengthen HBCUs since World War II including but not limited to (1) the landmark case Brown v. The Board of Education which forced states to increase their funding of HBCUs and open their other institutions to African Americans; (2) the Civil
Rights Act of 1964 which gave the federal government great power to enforce desegregation; (3) the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, provided enhanced public funding for HBCUs and defined an HBCU as any accredited college or university that was established prior to 1964 and whose principal mission aims to educate black Americans.

Additionally, four U.S. Presidents have signed Executive Orders to help strengthen HBCUs. The first Executive Order was signed by President Jimmy Carter in 1980 to establish a federal program to strengthen and expand the capacity of historically black colleges and universities to provide quality education (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev., 2009). Subsequent Executive Orders established the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities and the Presidential Advisory Board on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. President George W. Bush signed an Executive Order in 2002 which transferred the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities to the Office of the Secretary within the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev., 2009).

Not every state complied with the legislative initiatives thereby resulting to judicial rulings which forced them to comply. Ebony Towers in Higher Education written by Ricard and Brown (2008) highlights the pivotal case of United States v. Fordice which found that the state of Mississippi was operating segregated schools. In 1975, private plaintiff Jake Ayers, along with the United States, filed a lawsuit against the state of Mississippi, contending that by law segregation still existed in higher education. On June 26, 1992, after a lengthy civil battle, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed and remanded the
ruling of the Court of Appeals, declaring that Mississippi had not desegregated its dual system of higher education.

Ricard and Brown (2008) opined:

“the case exposed the funding discrepancies and showed just how separate and unequal HBCUs remained. Rather than integrating the campus or increasing funds for predominantly Black universities, Mississippi proposed closing some of the Black schools and merging them with stronger and better-funded institutions which are almost exclusively White” (p. 12).

Nevertheless, more so than not, the Historically Black Colleges and Universities have had tremendous success over the years. A few of the most notable successes includes graduating more than half of African-American professionals and awarding more than one in three of the natural science degrees, and half of the mathematics degrees, held by African Americans (U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Dev., 2009). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (2009) highlights some of the most notable graduates of HBCUs including but not limited to Booker T. Washington (Hampton University) and W.E.B. DuBois (Fisk University). Other notable HBCU graduates include but are not limited to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., (Morehouse College), Rosa Parks (Alabama State University), Medgar Evers (Alcorn State University), Justice Thurgood Marshall (Lincoln University), former Legislator Barbara Jordan (Texas Southern University), former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young (Howard University), and Ralph Ellison (Tuskegee University) (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Dev., 2009).
Washington and DuBois were, and remain so, well-known throughout the African American community and beyond. Their different viewpoints on Black education was a defining point in time in the history of the African American community and the Historically Black College and University setting. Ricard and Brown (2008) suggest that this was the most popular debate that held opposing views with respect to the nature of Black education. Washington advocated for vocational training because he thought the role of Black colleges and universities should be to train individuals to fill the manual labor market while Du Bois, on the other hand, suggested that Black colleges should work toward building an elite group commonly described as the *Talented Tenth* because he felt that students should be trained to uplift the Black community by becoming doctors and teachers, rather than being limited to trades such as farming and masonry. Black colleges find value in supporting both perspectives by developing educational environments that affords students the opportunity to have both industrial *and* liberal arts courses.

**LGBTQ Students and the Community College**

Studies have shown that LGBTQ students have remained an understudied population of students; and, particularly when considering the two-year colleges (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016). Other studies have suggested that LGBTQ students do not feel supported at the two-year college. According Whitehead (2019), LGBTQ+ students felt alienated and marginalized and their perceptions may have resulted from limited resources, programs, and student organization offerings. Whitehead (2019) additionally suggests that community colleges create spaces where LGBTQ+ students of color feel supported and valued.
Taylor (2015) asserted that community colleges needed to make an institutional commitment to support LGBTQ students and equity-minded leadership. Taylor (2015) further stated that a commitment from institutional leadership would send a clear message to the college stakeholders and has the potential to ensure long-term success.

Community colleges have long embraced the enrichment, personal, and professional development of diverse students; however, that same level of commitment has not been given to LGBTQ students at two-year institutions according to researchers, Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri (2016). Garvey, Taylor and Rankin’s (2014) study reported LGBTQ students who felt their instructors were indifferent, openly did not support LGBTQ issues, and/or felt uncomfortable discussing LGBTQ topics. It was further noted that the two-year college was less inclusive in implementing LGBTQ issues and identities in the curriculum (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015).

Campus Climate

Nguyen et al. (2018) remarked that campus climate research related to LGBTQ student populations has recognized higher education as being mainly hostile, chilly, and discriminatory. The campus climate sets the tone for how students will perceive the institution as a whole. Students (including LGBTQ students) want to attend an institution that is welcoming, safe, and conducive to learning.

Notwithstanding, often times LGBTQ students in secondary schools and postsecondary institutions find themselves victims of bullying, harassment, and physical assault. Otto, Middleton & Freker (2002) opined that “for lesbian and gay teens, school is often a nightmare. Harassment from classmates is commonplace, particularly because many teachers and principals tolerate it” (p. 2). They stated that more than 25% of self-
identified gay teens missed school because they feared for their safety whereas only 5% of heterosexual students reported the same. Further, nearly one-third of gay teens had reported being threatened with a weapon at school, compared to 7% of heterosexual students. Otto, Middleton, and Freker (2002) highlighted that in a separate study, 53% of high school students reported hearing homophobic slurs such as “faggot” from their teachers.

Further, research suggests that homosexuals are victims of prejudice within the educational setting. The prejudicial acts experienced by LGBTQ students occur in various ways including marginalization to outright assault. These homophobic acts not only impact LGBTQ students on campus, these acts also impact LGBTQ administrators, faculty and staff. For example, Majied (2010) notes that LGBTQ teachers often times do not disclose their sexual orientation, and when they do decide to disclose their sexual orientation, they risk being subject to discrimination or loss of employment.

Squire and Mobley (2015) opined that positive experiences on campus and within the classroom context provide encouraging peer interactions, promote student learning, and advance critical thinking skills for Black students. Additionally, students are attracted to institutions that they can call home. In essence, they want to feel as if they are a part of the community regardless of race, sex, religion, disability, etc. When institutions foster a campus climate wherein all students feel a sense of community, students perform at a higher rate. College campuses are no place for bullying, harassment, or violence of any kind (Iconis, 2010; Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; Mobley & Johnson, 2015; Dessel, Goodman, & Woodford, 2017).
According to Brockenbrough (2015), there’s a growing public concern related to bullying of LGBTQ individuals in recent years which has strengthened the spotlights on the discrimination of LGBTQ people of color in K-12 and postsecondary education. Tragic incidents such as the fatal shooting of Lawrence King inside a California junior high school (Setoodah, 2008), the homophobic violence toward and harassment of gay and gender nonconforming students at Morehouse College (Knight, 2010; Lee, 2003), and the suicides of bullied young students like Jaheem Herrera (Simon, 2009) and Carl Walker-Hoover (James, 2009) are noteworthy examples of such queer discrimination in America.

Coleman (2016) concludes that there is an important need to provide a better environment for LGBT students – particularly at HBCUs. Coleman (2016) further suggested that in order for HBCUs to progress and have a significant impact on LGBT issues, they must aim for diversity among their administrative ranks and promote an inclusive environment through their policies, procedures, and practices; and further asserted that this requires the HBCUs to fully understand the complexities of the LGBT culture so they may truly articulate the LGBT community needs.

Garvey et al. (2017) acknowledged that campus climate is a central focal point for many LGBTQ undergraduate students ranging from recruitment and admissions to retention and graduation. Garvey et al. (2017) declared that the warmth or chillness of a college or university environment vastly shapes the availability of resources and inclusive policies for LGBTQ students. Garvey and Rankin’s (2015) study confirmed that non-inclusive curricula and poor institutional support yields a negative perception from
LBGTQ students. In fact, “minority students (including LGBTQ students) perceive their identities and experiences as nonexistent at best and distained at worst” (p. 198).

**Campus Resources**

Woodford et al. (2018) suggested that LGBTQ initiatives and resources such as LGBTQ inclusive policies, LGBTQ resource centers, and LGBTQ student organizations can offer sexual and gender minority students various instrumental and psychological benefits and opined that such benefits could contribute to positive psychological well-being.

Woodford et al. (2018) study further held the position that a higher level of student support through strategies such as institutional policies, formal educational resources, and LGBTQ student organizations can have beneficial impacts by reducing minority stressors that increase LGBTQ students’ risk for negative outcomes, including psychological distress, academic disengagement, and lower academic performance.

Coleman (2016) present arguments to emphasize that LGBTQ students have been overlooked over the last decade and that a majority of HBCUs have failed to acknowledge them [LGBTQ students] in campus programs and activities. Coleman (2016) further asserts that we are far from having a large amount of LGBTQ representation among faculty, administrators and in athletic programs.

According to Nguyen et al. (2018), ample evidence supports the notion that student organizations can serve as important social support for minoritized students. Nguyen et al., (2018) emphasized the importance of having LGBTQ+ specific counseling services and career planning services. The study shows that some students reported suffering from depression and even contemplating suicide and underlined the help
counseling services provided. Others highlighted the need for career counselors who understood LGBTQ+ issues – stressing the need for Out for Work certifications so their institutions could receive valuable resources specifically for LGBTQ+ college students and career counselors working with LGBTQ+ students (Nguyen et al., 2018).

Pitcher et al. (2018) concluded that LGBTQ+ resource centers, student organizations, policies, and a supportive college environment were primary mechanisms for supporting LGBTQ+ students. Pitcher et al. (2018) moreover argued that higher education professionals must make significant strides within the higher education environment to fully support LGBTQ+ students – highlighting policies, programs, and services as three ways to accomplish the task.

Jaekel (2015) insisted that learning communities can assist in meeting LGBTQ students’ needs by discovering community inside and outside the classroom; cultivating space where students can feel comfortable and safe to participate and learn; and by helping students persist in college.

Hsu (2017) states that a Gay Straight Alliance empowers LGBTQ students to be confident in themselves as well as encourages allies of LGBTQ peers to advocate for them. Hsu (2017) further emphasized the importance of LGBTQ students having a safe place where they feel supported and free to discuss their feelings that they might not otherwise do in other spaces.

Sense of Belonging

Institutions of higher learning must take broad steps to ensure LGBTQ students are protected and represented in all facets of the college experience. By doing so, LGBTQ students may develop a greater sense of belonging. Pitcher et al. (2018) declared
that inclusive policies may lead to a higher sense of belonging and ultimately lead to stronger LGBTQ+ student outcomes.

Brooms’ (2019) study confirmed that a sense of belonging is critical to students’ academic success. Broom (2019) claimed that an inviting and uplifting environment; a welcoming and supportive atmosphere; strong, positive relationships with teachers; and teachers care for and about students; were all key factors insofar as how students perceived themselves; how students believed in themselves and their self-efficacy; how students conceived of their academic success; and how they believe they belong in and to the school community.

Jaekel (2017) insisted that given the obstacle LGBTQ students faced and the lack of inclusion within the classroom and curriculum, explicit attention to the creation of space and inclusion was necessary so LGBTQ students could succeed in their education and feel a sense of belonging within their environment.

**Heterosexual Faculty and Staff Support of LGBTQ Students**

According to Linley et al. (2016) the positive influence of faculty on student academic success is well documented; however, LGBTQ students may not reach their full academic potential because they face particular challenges related to their identity. Further, historically, LGBTQ students have largely been ignored in diversity-oriented admission practices. The number of schools participating in LGBTQ outreach is relatively small compared to the number and variety of institutions in the U.S. (Cegler, 2012). In order for HBCUs (as well as other institutions of higher learning) to become more diverse and inclusive of LGBTQ students, all stakeholders should contribute to the
process. Student affairs professionals should continue to keep the issue of homophobia on the campus at the forefront of their professional vision (Thatcher and Chandler, 2013).

Vervoort and Gasman (2016) noted that seeing LGBTQ people in leadership roles helped LGBTQ students by creating a more welcoming environment. Pitcher et al., (2018) further asserts that although higher education professionals aim to provide an environment wherein student success is priority, not much has been done to improve LGBTQ students’ success.

According to Fine (2012), higher education professionals must realize that homophobia and heterosexism exist in various places on campus and develop plans for addressing same. McLaughlin (2017) further argued that higher education professionals, who work with students outside the classroom, have the ability to establish campus spaces where students feel safe and welcomed and which foster student success.

Linley et al. (2016) showed that minority students tend to perform at a higher average when they identify with their professors. In fact, Linley et al. (2016) documented in their study that LGBT students reported a higher satisfaction with faculty than their straight peers reported; however, they tend to experience more discrimination on campus than their counterparts. Further, the study suggested that LGBT students reported a less positive perception of their institution’s campus climate than their counterparts and many of them may fail to reach their full academic potential because of challenges they face related to their identity (Linley et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Kortegast and Toorn (2018), opined that student affairs professionals who were more open about their sexual orientation reported experiencing more discrimination in their work environments and noted that several religiously
affiliated institutions that still have policies banning homosexual behavior that is extended to LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators. Kortegast and Toorn (2018) reported results of a national campus climate survey that revealed 20% of staff indicated experiencing hostile, exclusionary, offensive, or intimidating conduct because of their LGBTQ identity.

**LGBTQ Students, Faculty, and Staff**

Garvey, Sanders, and Flint (2017) found that graduate students who recognized more LGBTQ faculty and staff had a better experience with campus climate. As noted by Coleman (2016), LGBT students, staff, faculty and administrators play a vital role in creating friendly environments. Notwithstanding, HBCU administrators are the ones hindering growth in acknowledgment, acceptance, and tolerance of LGBT students (Coleman, 2016).

Coleman (2016) further pointed out that HBCUs fail to recognize, and seem naïve of the fact that LGBT colleagues – faculty, staff, and administrators – exist amongst them. The fact is that these same LGBT colleagues could potentially support and foster change; however, as Coleman (2016) additionally explained, these LGBT faculty, staff, and administrators are less likely to support any initiative that goes against administrators (i.e., administrators in high ranks, administrators with the power or influence to terminate, etc.) without true job protection.

Coleman (2016) suggested that other administrators in support of such initiatives fail to make their positions known as they worry that their support could lead to their sexuality being critiqued – regardless of whether or not they are gay. As such, LGBT
students have very little support mechanisms in faculty and staff who publicly support their cause.

Coleman (2016) indicated that although all institutions have enacted policies to address equal opportunity employment, the statement for the most part only fulfills the legal requirement to do so rather than truly represent the institutions’ actions; and further suggested that, without faculty and administrative support, issues affecting LGBT students will be a challenge for college and universities.

Smith’s (2018) study addressed tolerance discourse and avoiding difference. He stated that teachers are challenged to minimize LGBTQ students’ experiences of stigma and exclusion by simply not recognizing gender or sexuality differences or discussing issues related to same; and, in response, proposed scholarship about LGBTQ-focused professional development or teacher education content that can prepare teachers to address issues facing LGBTQ students in the K-12 and college and university settings.

Kortegast’s (2017) study showed that while a majority of student housing and residence life departments promote community and inclusive practices, LGBTQ students lived experiences reflect otherwise – not always aligning with promoted standards. Kortegast (2017) further explained that LGBTQ students did not feel supported by housing professionals nor did they have confidence that housing professionals would eliminate harassment incidents.

In summary, LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff are being negatively impacted by queer discrimination in higher education that hinders their academic success. More specifically, the research suggests that HBCU campuses’ climate isn’t welcoming to LGBTQ students and a lack of campus resources exist to support LGBTQ students,
further supporting the notion that LGBTQ students are not equally important as their non-homosexual peers. The research further suggests that LGBTQ students need more visible LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators in higher education to whom they can relate – improving their sense of belonging. All of the above statements validate the need for this study.
CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

Purpose Overview and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at three public Historically Black Universities and two public Historically Black Community Colleges in Mississippi and to gather ideas from the LGBTQ students’ perspective on how to enhance policies, procedures, and practices at HBCUs to cultivate acceptance and inclusion of LGBTQ students. This chapter discusses the researcher stance in relation to the social and political context of this study; and describes the research methodology that was used in this study including the purpose of the study, study participants, data collection process, data collection instruments, and data analysis.

Positionality

As higher education professional who previously worked for a community college designated as a HBCU, I observed some colleagues who frowned upon the idea of developing and implementing programs aims at supporting LGBTQ students. The topic, LGBTQ students, was viewed by some colleagues as inappropriate dialogue in the workplace. Some were observed as being physically uncomfortable discussing the matter. As result, I recognized a need to explore this underserved population of students in an effort to raise awareness and effect positive change.

An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used to analyze the participants’ interview transcripts. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provides an opportunity for participants who experience similar events to share their stories without distortions and/or prosecutions (Alase, 2017).
According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), “the study of experience is done through stories. Emphasis is on the stories people tell and on how these stories are communicated—on the language used to tell the stories” (p. 231). Frank (1995) opined that “narratives constructed from fieldnotes, interview transcripts, personal experiences, or other empirical materials enable readers to think with and feel with a story, rather than explicitly analyzing its meaning” (p. 599). I identified and examined themes within the transcripts in an effort to highlight ways HBCU professionals can improve the campus environment for LGBTQ students.

Further, I explored the theory of care in an effort to highlight the responsibilities of higher education professionals to all students regardless of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Irby et al. (2013) referenced Gilligan’s moral development theory by noting the following:

“Gilligan proposed that care might be another (in her view, particularly female) main criterion for morality. The focus, then, is not that all people have to be treated equally, but that each person deserves to be cared for in cases of need. We have responsibility for the well-being of those individuals of whom we are in charge of or are in contact with” (p. 569).

The specific research questions that are addressed in the study, from the students’ perspective, include:

1. How does the selected LGBTQ students perceive the HBCU college experience?
2. What can HBCU institutions do to create a more diverse and inclusive environment where LGBTQ students feel safe and valued.
Research Design

Data Collection Procedures

An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research method, was used as the primary method of data collection. The IPA approach is used to investigate and interpret the “lived experiences” of people who have experienced similar (common) phenomenon thereby giving them the opportunity to tell their stories without any distortions and/or prosecutions (Alase, 2017). Since this study’s focus was geared toward understanding the lived experiences of LGBTQ students and exploring solutions for implementing a more diverse and inclusive environment, then a phenomenological approach was the most reliable data collection method.

Participants

Research suggests that between 2 and 25 participants is acceptable for traditional phenomenological research (Alase, 2017); thus, a total of 10 student participants who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ), who are enrolled as full-time students at a selected public, two-year or four-year, historically black college or university (HBCU) located in the state of Mississippi was selected for this study. The course level classification of the participants ranged from freshman to senior, both undergraduate and graduate students. Participants volunteered and were not paid for any part of their involvement in the study.

For the purposes of this study, the Bible Belt was limited to the state of Mississippi due to the fact that it is considered as a highly religious state. Participants from the following institutions were targeted: (1) Alcorn State University located in Lorman, Mississippi; (2) Jackson State University located in Jackson, Mississippi; (3)
Mississippi Valley State University located in Itta Bena, Mississippi; (4) Coahoma Community College located in Clarksdale, Mississippi; and (5) Hinds Community College – Utica Campus located in Utica, Mississippi. Notwithstanding, recruitment efforts at Alcorn State University and Hinds Community College – Utica Campus were unsuccessful.

**Materials/Instrumentation**

Interviews occurred virtually using Zoom. Although a questionnaire was used to assist in guiding the interviews, the participants’ responses ultimately guided the interview process. The questionnaire contained between 25 open-ended questions. The questions were divided into three sections. The first section of questions were related to the participants’ background and demographic information (i.e., residence location, high school attended, high school climate and culture, religious background, parental support, and family acceptance). The second section of questions were related to the participants’ level of college engagement and academic success (i.e., college classification, grades, student conduct issues, campus involvement, extracurricular activities, etc.). The third section of questions were related to the participants’ college environment and LGBTQ-initiatives (i.e., campus climate, activities, programs, resources, faculty-student relationships, staff-student relationships, college policies, etc.). Three electronic recording devices were used during the interviews to ensure the data was collected successfully. The devices included a Dictaphone, iPhone, and Surface Pro Tablet.

**Procedure**

Adequate time was allowed so that participants were not constrained by an imposed time limit. I did not anticipate that any of the interviews would last more than
two hours in length and we were able to stay within that time frame. As noted above, each interview was recorded with three recording devices to ensure the interviews were taped adequately and to prevent lost data. Participants were asked to clarify and elaborate on phrases and words I did not understand or in case of ambiguity or lack of clarity. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and coded. The transcripts were checked for accuracy by the researcher and a second individual. The recordings were transcribed using Microsoft Word software.

Data Storage and Management

A copy of the transcripts were saved on a USB drive, an external hard drive, and in the researcher’s Office 365 OneDrive storage system. The transcripts are password protected. Prior to the transcription process, the devices were properly secured in a locked fireproof file cabinet that is in the possession of the researcher. Following the successful transcription of the data, the recordings were properly deleted to protect the participants’ confidential information. Selections from participants’ testimony is redacted to protect their anonymity.

Document Analysis

Prior to analyzing the data, I reflected back to the literature to assist in properly planning. As noted by Creswell (2013) and cited in Alase (2017), I describe my own experiences with the phenomenon so I could set aside my personal biases prior to examining the participants’ transcripts. This positioned me to see the participants’ positions through clear lenses – having no prejudgments or preconceived notions. As noted in O’Leary (2014), I documented my assumptions and biases prior to analyzing data as well as throughout the entire research process.
Following the planning phase, I began reading the participants’ transcripts—thoroughly examining each page to carefully identify any common themes or repeated words and/or phrases in hopes of condensing the transcripts (Alase, 2017).

Data Analysis

The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was utilized during this study. Being guided by Creswell (2013) and Alase (2017), I applied the necessary IPA steps to properly code the themes identified in the data. More specifically, the following steps were followed throughout the data analysis process:

*Steps of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis*

Step 1 involved developing a list of significant statements as a way to truly understand the phenomenon (Creswell 2013 as cited in Alase, 2017). I referred back to the literature and organize several themes that guided the literature review as well as pulled some of the initial statements identified throughout the participants’ transcripts that documented their experiences. I grouped the statements into themes.

Step 2 included writing a description of what and how the participants’ experienced in the phenomenon verbatim - this process is known as the textural and structural descriptions respectively (Creswell 2013 as cited in Alase, 2017).

Step 3 consisted of writing a composite description of the phenomenon using the textural and structural descriptions collectively. I read the transcripts several times to look for patterns and common themes. I also compared the transcripts to the recordings to ensure accuracy – further condensing the transcripts. I use a color-coded system to document the common themes and transfer those themes into tables using Microsoft Word.
Finally, step 4 involved writing mini statements summarizing what each of the participants’ experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell 2013 as cited in Alase, 2017).

Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research is highly important. Morrow (2005) recommended grounding our research “not only in the substantive theory base leading to the questions guiding the research but also firmly in the paradigm that is mostly appropriate to that research as well as in more transcendent criteria for trustworthiness” (p. 250). Researchers want to know that the information we are sharing; the findings that we are reporting; and the conclusions we draw are supported by evidence. In essence, researchers should be able to trust the findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This can be accomplished by triangulation – using various sources of evidence to support the study’s findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Therefore, to support the findings of this study, I included peer-reviewed literature to corroborate the student participants’ testimonies. As noted above, the study included a sample of students from three different HBCUs positioned in various locations of the state of Mississippi – serving both two-year and four-year public institutions. In essence, the participants are various representations of the LGBTQ community who may view their HBCU experiences from different perspectives.

Furthermore, is it noted that trustworthiness is also established during the preparation stages when I was designing the study and selected my choice of methodology (Brown, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 as cited in Malone, 2017). The research questions in this study specifically address the experiences of LGBTQ students
at HBCUs and solicits their recommendations for how HBCUs can become more diverse and inclusive; thus, LGBTQ students attending HBCUs are the most appropriate source of information thereby making them the most appropriate data set resulting in minimal threat to trustworthiness.

Summary

This study employed the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research approach, to examine the experiences of LGBTQ students at three public HBCUs in the state of Mississippi – referred to as a “Bible Belt State.” The study’s methodology and analysis derived from Noddings’ Theory of Care framework whereby highlighting the “lived experiences” of LGBTQ students by examining similar patterns and themes in participants’ testimonies. It provides a framework to examine the culture of HBCUs and the impact it may have on LGBTQ students. More importantly, it provides the framework to examine what policies, procedures, and practices are necessary to develop a diverse and inclusive college environment for “all” students – LGBTQ students included. Chapters IV and V will discuss the study’s findings extensively, answers research questions, and provide implications for future research.
CHAPTER IV – ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This study examined the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt. The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences by employing an interpretive phenomenological analysis, a qualitative research approach, as described in Chapter III to identify patterns and themes in the participants’ interview transcripts. The transcripts were used to corroborate findings. The researcher discovered seven themes revealing the experiences of the research participants at the targeted HBCUs. The discovered themes were as follows: (1) perception of campus climate, (2) campus safety, (3) religion and the HBCU, (4) homophobia and the HBCU, (5) perception of faculty and staff culture, (6) LGBTQ student resources, and (7) LGBTQ awareness. The researcher used themes discovered from a phenomenological lens to organize the data that allowed the researcher to identify patterns and the story behind themes. In this chapter, the researcher presents the study’s findings, including ancillary findings and organizes the coded data by aforementioned themes. In Chapter V, the researcher uses the findings to answer the study’s research questions, provides implications from this study and recommendations for future research.

Introduction of Data

As explained in Chapter III, a total of ten students from selected, public, HBCUs in the state of Mississippi who self-identified as LGBTQ participated in this study, and each participant was interviewed once. Table 1 below provides the relevant demographics for each research participant. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom platform.
Table 1 Research Participants Relevant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student ID</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student A</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Coahoma CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student B</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>MVSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student C</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>MVSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student D</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>MVSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student E</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>JSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student F</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>JSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student G</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>JSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student H</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>JSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student I</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>JSU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student J</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>Coahoma CC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants’ answers to questions were at times very general and positive, while at other times, very detailing and powerful. From the ten interview transcripts, the researcher identified 168 statements relevant to the phenomenon of this study. For each participant, the researcher followed the interpretative phenomenological analysis steps for data analysis and reduction by examining each statement to ensure it was essential to understand the phenomenon and was labeled accurately. This process reduced the horizontalized statements to 120 invariant constituents. The researcher then clustered the statements for each participant into textual and structural descriptions respectively by writing what and how each participant experienced the phenomenon verbatim. The researcher then wrote a composite description of the phenomenon using the textural and structural descriptions collectively. Lastly, the researcher wrote mini statements summarizing what each of the participants’ experienced. Figure 1 below provides a diagram of the data analysis steps followed for each participant.
Introduction of Themes

By examining the interview transcripts through the phenomenological lens, the researcher discovered seven themes and ancillary findings. Each theme emphasizes the participants’ experiences. As discussed in Chapter I and II, “phenomenologists are interested in our ‘lived experience’. Phenomenology is the way of access to the world as we experience it pre-reflectively. Pre-reflective experience is the ordinary experience that we live in and that we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence. The reader should come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, ‘I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that.’ A phenomenological approach is well-suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, by exploring patterns in the participants’ interview
transcripts, the researcher was able to gain insight into the phenomenon. The participants’ transcripts illustrated what and how they have experienced their selected HBCU and highlight valuable information for improving the experience of future LGBTQ students at HBCUs. Theme 1 reveals how the participants perceive the climate at their institutions. Theme 2 describes what the participants have witnessed on their campuses and how those observations have shaped their feelings concerning campus safety. Theme 3 demonstrates how religious views have negatively impacted the participants’ experiences at their selected HBCUs. Theme 4 establishes how homophobia has impacted the selected HBCUs. Theme 5 reveals how the participants perceive the faculty and staff culture at their selected HBCUs. Theme 6 demonstrates the need for LGBTQ student resources on HBCU campuses. Theme 7 illustrates the importance of LGBTQ awareness efforts and demonstrates how the targeted HBCUs are faring. The ancillary findings emphasize the importance of addressing mental health in the LGBTQ community. The themes and examples from the data are explained further below.

Theme One: Perception of Campus Climate

The participants’ perceptions of the campus climate shaped their attitudes towards an understanding of their HBCUs. Some participants described their campus negatively, using words such close-minded, cringing, heavily religious, irritating, judgmental, narrow-minded, rejecting, and unwelcoming.

Student A, a student from Coahoma Community College stated the following: …they don’t have to do all like all that extra stuff, like multiple big seminars and all that to make us feel welcome, but at least just talk to us and don’t make us feel
like we’re unwelcome or we’re being rejected based off our choices and based on their religion.

Here, Student A, is telling us that he wants to be seen. He wants to be heard. He believes a simple conversation between him and a faculty or staff member is more effective than the bells and whistle (the extra).

Student C, a student from Mississippi Valley State, stressed the importance of having a campus with open-minded people:

…but there are some ideologies that, you know, the close mindedness, that's what I would, you know, work on or I would change about the community, which, in turn, it flows into the campus. So even if, you know, my campus is open-minded, if the community that we serve or that we're in isn't open-minded, it really just washes out all of the work on campus, you know, because once we leave our campus and we go to like the stores or the events, off campus, then what? So not only on my campus, but the community that we live in; just the open-mindedness of queer people and LGBTQ+ people.

It seems that Student C is asking for understanding. She is wanting the college community to respect her and other LGBTQ students as individuals by seeing them as such. Student C is asking for tolerance. She is asking for the college community to accept her and look beyond her sexuality.

Student D, a student from Mississippi Valley State, described the campus as follows:

… cringing, is because every moment, you never know what's gonna go on. And I don't like being surprised a lot. So, I am going to say my experience is cringing
because I never know if it's gonna be a good day, if something irritating is gonna happen, if I'm going to run into an idiot who feels like they want to say something to me. If I'm gonna walk past a group of boys and they want to laugh at me and say something slick, if I'm gonna meet some new friends, if I'm gonna walk past and people be like, oh Student D, come turn up with us, you never know.

... Valley is a perfect example of having a sand castle and having somebody kick it over every time. Because just when you think you having good fun at Valley, they are going to always do something that make you irritated, but you have to love it, which is sad.

It appears that the college environment is ever-changing for Student D. He doesn't know what to expect from his experience day to day on his campus. He seems frustrated by the process and disappointed.

Student F, a student from Jackson State University, said:

Uh, no. I wouldn't honestly. I mean, if that's like, because if your sexual orientation is something that you know, you feel, if it won't be validated, you won't be okay. Or if like, somebody, if it's not in an accepting environment, you won't be, your wellbeing won't be well, then no, I would not.

Because there are like a lot of closeted kids at school. And I don't know if they are like that because they just choose to be, or the culture in general, but yeah, I feel like they should just recognize that they exist would help.

Student F feels rejected and has no sense of belonging on his campus. He doesn't believe the college campus is making it a priority to be inclusive of all students. Student F would like to see a campus that is accepting of all people.
Despite the negative views, Student E, a student at Jackson State University, believes the campus climate has improved, progressing, and is becoming more accepting: Because I've heard students go down the plaza, or the main walkway, and every now and then, you would see a LGBTQ student who maybe wear some type of LGBTQ paraphernalia. You may see an LGBTQ student dancing down the Tiger Walk, and you would hear a student yell out of their room, fag or sissy. Those days were when I first went to JSU back in the 2010. I don't really hear that anymore.

Student E sees things from a different perspective. Though he still believes there is improvement to make, he does believe things have changed for the better. He acknowledges positive change on his campus.

Student J, a student from Coahoma Community College, views the campus climate at her institutions the same; accepting, a place where she feels free to be herself.

Nothing at all. I will say that because I feel free. When I’m not at home, I feel free. I feel so free. As in like, I can be somebody that I want to be. I don’t have to pretend nowhere or none of that. I mean, I love my college experience. Coahoma like, I have met some good people at Coahoma.

However, it is important to note that Student J acknowledges that LGBTQ males are not as nicely received by the campus community, and they are often judged by their heterosexual male peers.

Like, they actually accept you for who you are. There is no discrimination. They don’t tell you, “you can’t wear that.” “You need to take that off.” They don’t do none of that. It’s not no discrimination against you. And that’s another reason
why I like Coahoma. Like I said, the only people that are going to judge you is the students. As in boys judging other boys. But they are not going to come in your face and be like, you’re wrong, or all that type stuff. They are going to welcome you. I like their environment, honestly. How they welcome me.

Student B and Student C seems to believe the same differential treatment exist at their institutions:

Um, for females and males is different. I think as a female, I get, if anything, I get praise. I get more accepted, but I feel like, for a male, it’s very dangerous and it’s very sad. Because where I’m from in the Midwest, you know there’s still homophobia out here, but it’s not as bad as in the South.

I would recommend it to the girls, but I wouldn’t recommend it to the guys. It’s just that. I don’t want to put, like, I feel like as a guy, I wouldn’t want them to get down there. Nah. I wouldn’t even recommend it to a masculine gay guy. I wouldn’t recommend it to the gay guys, but I would recommend it to the gay girls though. Because I just feel like it is safer for girls than boys. If a girl hits on a girl, it’s just like, oh, I’m good, but if a guy hits on a guy, it’s like they can get beat up down there. Yeah, I wouldn’t recommend it for the guys.

But for my friends that are like non-binary or they present themselves more masculine as a female, I see how they get treated a little bit more harsher than I’m treated, even if we're in the same setting, you know, so that's that there. I wouldn't say like all men because some of my male friends who present themselves in a masculine way, they don't really get the backlash either. Even if it's known that they do identify as LGBTQ. (Student C)
Theme Two: Campus Safety

Several participants voiced their concerns for a safer campus. Participants provided several major examples of crimes that have occurred on their campuses. Incidents revealed included incidents of homophobic treatment, campus shootings, sexual assaults, rape, and more. Some argue that law enforcement presence is minimal or inadequate.

Well, because, we’ve, I’m pretty sure you heard we had fights, we had two shootings on campus this year. We’ve had fights and a rape, so like, huh I just don’t really feel safe or protected. …Um, one guy tried to rape another guy. Not tried. He did rape him. (Student A)

So, staff and then some of my friends they don't feel safe, male friends, they don't feel safe in their dorms. But nobody talks about that. I'm pretty sure everybody knows because we have, like, I'm just gonna say it, some of the football players are homophobic, and they live in the same dorms as my friends. (Student C)

And that's another thing like, with the inclusion and diversity of like the departments on campus, even though it's open, and they say that they make it, they try to make it feel open and inclusive. The department is full of cisgender heterosexual males. So, if you're in a position, like I am, or one of my male friends who presents more feminine, like, are you really comfortable? Like, even though it's open? Are you comfortable, you know, so that's a step that our institution needs to take, having the police department open, having people that you like, even though they're approachable and things like that, it's just certain like that aspect is still there. Like it's mainly one population there to serve the
various different populations on campus. Um, our Vice President of Student Affairs, like she has an open-door policy. Even in our like non-discrimination statements, like it's there, it's written, but I don't think it is enforced. Like I said, first of all, the reporting process, I feel like it could be better, like it's just is drawn, I feel like there's too drawn out and sometimes students just don't want to go through that process. And then second, coming from like, a female perspective, a woman's perspective. Um, it's not like domestic violence between women, um, women on women relationships is not taken seriously on campus. (Student C)

Some of my friends that I have known, a lot of them have been sexually assaulted on campus. Oh yeah, we have a really bad, bad, bad, problem like with that. A lot of students have like, in their first years or first semesters of college, they've been assaulted. My one friend, this random person, who is just off the street, just somehow ended up raping her. And yeah, our campus is very open, so we have like a lot of problems like that. And then I know one of my friends, one of my friends, one of my peers, he had an experience where he was like drunk in his dormitory, and like he was like, in his RA, like, brought him into the room and like his RA ended up like sexually assaulting him while he was drunk. And like he told me that he went to the police and like, they didn't do anything. They were just like, oh, you got raped by another man, uh, don't know what to do. Yeah, I know a lot of people that have been assaulted on campus by strangers, other students, and they don't really do anything. So, they have a bad track record. (Student F)
Yeah, there is a culture at Jackson State that doesn't allow people to, like feel safe. Especially, like, I told you about my friend. I think he is out of the closet, like bisexual or whatever. I feel like a lot of students, not a lot of them, but I know just some people that have left school because they have been assaulted or they felt like they just didn't fit into, they felt like there was a narrow experience at Jackson State. (Student F)

On campus, they got these little people out in those little security houses. Very rarely do you see people walking on campus as campus security. I've been over there a couple times, and I was amazed that I'm like, there's a whole lot of people but no campus security. (Student I)

Student B perceives campus safety at her institution as adequate. She discusses what she has seen at her residence hall.

Well, the police are out all the time. The police are constantly out all the time, and then at night, that's usually when the RAs will go to their dorm rooms. There's like this big security dude who is there from like 9pm to like, probably like six in the morning or something like that. Like he is a big security dude. So, he's enough to secure the premises because he's a big dude. It'll be two big dudes. Um, like at night, and the police are like around all the time.

Theme Three: Religion and the HBCU

Participants described their experiences confronting the religious beliefs of others on campus and how those experiences made them feel as students.

Well, simple. It’s all about their personal beliefs. They don’t want to, you know, go against their religion or have people at their church look at what they’re doing
at the school, and you know, kind of look at them differently. …advise them to not to force your religion on someone else and make religious remarks when someone is telling them that they are gay. (Student A)

Because, it’s like, to me, it’s like, when you do that, you’re basically telling me that “we don’t accept you.” And um, everybody wants to feel accepted. But, you know, when you bring up religious topics and everybody in the gay community know about the Bible, because I’m pretty sure they have been preached to about the Bible, it’s kind of, you know, a reject feeling. You feel rejected. (Student A)

And I get so sick and tired of running into people that, "I'm Christian. I don't agree with what you do, but I'm not gonna you know disrespect you as a person."

But at the same time, you're still basically telling me you don't like me. And at the same time, you're basically telling me that I can't honestly approach you and talk to you about certain thing. (Student D)

The first thing that came to mind was being more open-minded to all types of black experiences. I felt that at Jackson State it was very, we are black, Southern, Christian, kind of conservative, etcetera. And I feel like for a lot of kids that came from outside areas, you know, that was kind of stifling because there was only so much within that culture that was not acceptable, but just that was done. (Student F)

So, with Mississippi being the southern small Baptist state that it is, everybody assumes that if you don't come out as anything, they assume you are just straight. So, I would like to stop the assuming of the heterosexuality because it's not the
time that we're in now. Everybody's different. I would like them to, they have a lot of assemblies, so I would like for them to have an assembly specifically dedicated to LGBTQ+ students to let them know that they're involved in the concern and that you actually care. And I would say just hosting a meeting with them to hear their voices because it's not just about me. I would want as a group to get group ideas. (Student G)

I just didn't understand why HBCUs don't embrace something different. They're rigid in their thinking. It's almost like they move the Baptist church into the school, or the AME church into the school. You feel me, because those are people that go to those churches and then they come to work. And then they're over your children. And then we are children voice problems about being different or being you know, whatever. They don't have any outlet; they don't have any place to go. (Student I)

Theme Four: Homophobia and the HBCU

Participants perceived their campuses as homophobic and shared many examples of homophobic incidents that they witnessed first-hand. Many of the participants have also been victims to homophobic acts on their campuses. A student described his experience interacting with his heterosexual male peers on campus, “…like the football team, you kind of get the sense that they don’t feel comfortable around gay dudes. And like, you probably will get, like a slur towards the gay dudes every now and then, like, faggot.” Student J, who also attends Coahoma Community College, seems to agree and perceive the judgment to be directly solely at the LGBTQ males. “Don’t nobody judge
nobody. If somebody’s gonna judge somebody, you know it’s the boys judging the other boys.”

Student B also witnessed homophobia at Mississippi Valley State University. She described one incident as senseless:

And so, the guy all of sudden, he’s like, oh, he talked about how guys be gay and stuff like that. And I was like, “well, hold on because I’m bisexual.” And he was like, “oh, it’s okay that you’re bisexual.” He literally told me it’s okay that you’re bisexual because you’re a girl, and you’re not a guy. And I said, “it’s either gay or straight.” And I said, “well, that doesn’t make sense because bi means both…

It was just the whole walking out on a dude dancing, or how dudes use the F-word. The F-word is regularly said down there by the dudes down there. …The F-word that rhymes with maggot.

Student C described the homophobic nature at Mississippi Valley State University as, “nothing that's frowned upon to be hateful of the community, is not frowned upon at all on our campus.” She further reveals an incident that left me speechless:

It was a freshman, a gay male on my campus, had an incident with his roommate, where his roommate was just very very homophobic and he would just throw, lash out homophobic, homophobic slurs at him, and not want to like let him in a room if he left his key and stuff like that. But the freshman was, I guess not comfortable in speaking with the staff, so it was just very hard to get him to report.

Like, he was telling me how the roommate was like, telling him about doing him in the... it was just a lot. I don't even want to repeat it, but like living with someone who doesn’t respect you, basically that was like one of the worst
instances that I've had to listen to. And then the student just being so uncomfortable reporting it, and then having to go the whole semester, the whole year in that room. And it's a whole process of moving your room. So, it was just like you went a whole semester, sometimes, you know, he came to my room, you know, since I live by myself, so it was just like to be paying for something that you're not comfortable being in, but not thinking that you have the resources, you know, there in place to protect you. Those are like the, the stories or the events where it's just, like, outrageous for me and it's like, wow.

Student D recalled his experience with homophobia on campus. He felt as if he was invisible to his heterosexual male counterparts on campus.

And those boys would be like, you would really think, like did something to them. Because I could speak, I be like, "Hey y'all." Won't nobody say a word. If I am sitting down there. Say I'm playing spades with the other boys. That I was actually cool with. Because I had gotten close with a few boys who were straight and we will have regular conversations, they were like dope people, they'll come down there and speak to everybody at the table but me. And I'm like, "y'all bugging. Because just because I'm gay don't mean I automatically like you."

And I said that like as a black gay male, in the black community, we're faggots; in the white community, we're niggers; and to everybody else, we're unwanted. And it's one thing for black men to be like, no one loves us, no one defends us, we're built to be strong; but y'all kick us down and we are also black men, but just because we are gay, we have to be even stronger than y'all. And for
us to have to go through so much, I don't understand why everybody think gay
black people are weak.

Student D further described his experience as survival:

I'm always really ducked off. Usually, I'm in the front of everything, or I'm
always in the middle. If it's all boys, I'm on the wall or I'm sitting on the couch. I
don't want nobody to think I'm trying to be up on them. I'm trying to keep down
confusion. It's like my defense mechanism as a gay boy. Like, I feel like every
gay male has a defense mechanism. Like, we know how to survive in straight
spaces. So, it is what it is.

Student E labeled the homophobia he witnessed at Jackson State University as
“bashing” and wished that everyone would respect others around them.

You know, you have to deal with listening to other people bashing. You have to
deal with other people having their comments out loud. And I just don't feel like
that's right? That's one thing I wish the campus could enforce as well. You know,
be who you are and live in your truth, but respect the next individual.

Student E recalls a time at Jackson State when the homophobic acts on campus
caused him to suppress his feelings and remain closeted out of fear of retaliation or
mistreatment by others.

There have been a lot of things in regards to Jackson State anyway. Where people
have had allegations for putting their hands on another student, that has kind of
come to a stop, and I'm really glad about that. Because that was always a fear of
mine. I felt that if I did come out in a collegiate system, or in an organization, that
I will be cast out, bashed, even assaulted. So, for them to have that freedom to say
that, that makes me happy. It makes me proud, because I wasn't one of those bandsmen that could walk around and say that.

Student F describes the homophobic conditions at Jackson State University as “worse” for the male LGBTQ students. She recalls her experiences witnessing homophobia first-hand and seeing “people be targeted and like taunted for it.”

If it came up, and I said something, I mean, nobody would just outright dog me or say something rude, but they just might be like, oh, okay, or like, you know, they might have been taken back. They are not going to say anything rude to my face. But yeah, I mean, it's definitely like some people who will express their discomfort or express their discomfort I guess, but they're not rude. But other people, like other students that are more like, open about who they are, like more flamboyant, like, especially gay males, like I've seen like a lot of like, people like dogging them, or degrading them in public or like talking down to them and stuff. So, I haven't had any negative experiences. Like people will be taken back, but it is not as, really not as bad as like, um, the treatment that I have seen, like, my gay male peers get. Yeah, they get it way worse. That's my opinion.

Theme Five: Perception of Faculty and Staff Culture

Participants perceptions of the faculty and staff culture at their institutions are varied. While some participants recall blatant disrespect from the faculty and staff at their institutions; others believe faculty and staff at their institutions are supportive of the LGBTQ student community. There were a few who were totally on the fence regarding this question. While they feel their faculty and staff are great at their jobs and prove to be
a great asset to the institution, they do not believe their faculty and staff are supportive of them as LGBTQ students.

Um, I’m not going to lie. You have like a few, a handful of faculty and staff who, you know, will sit and talk to you about it and be open-minded to the discussion, but also, you have a majority of faculty and staff who are not supportive. (Student A)

And it's just, it's one thing for it to be like under the rug, but it's like open and outward, you know, the faculty or the organization advisors to not saying anything about the blatant disrespect of a student's expression. So, we were discussing a book, and as I said, I don’t appear, so when I was, you know, I basically said it, like, yeah, identify as queer. The class just turned and looked to me, and they were like, you’re gay? And I’m like, yeah, and my teacher was like, and I’ll never forget this, she was like, “don’t bring that city stuff down here.” But even before we, you know, COVID-19 affected us, it was so hard getting administration to listen, like I had to send several emails, emails didn't get responded to; so I had to find time to go in, you know, pop up at their offices. It was just so hard. …So, getting other fraternities and sororities to participate in what I emphasized in my organization, it was hard, like, you know, my organization supported me simply because I was a part of that organization and it was a part of who I am. So, they supported the events that I wanted to bring to campus, but overall, the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement, it was like, no. They're like, you know, I don't think we really have the audience for this. (Student C)
I've experienced a lot of, for example, like having my gay friends, male friends, come visit me, it's a lot of like, I don't think they feel welcome there. One time a hall monitor said, "that gay boy is always up in here." You know just certain stuff like that, you know, that make you just not want to bring your friends to where you live or even come in there yourself, because if you're gonna call my friend out, you don't know if I identify as well. So, like you're hurting my feelings now. But you don't know you're hurting my feelings. (Student C)

Um, I will also change some of the professors' mindsets because, don't get me wrong, Valley has some of the nicest, bombest professors. I have met some of the greatest professors who treat me like their own child. But, some, like, it's not a connect. Like, I just feel like even though it's the job, true enough, and yes, you are a professor, and yes, I'm your student, and yes, we have to stay on a certain basis. I still would like to feel like you understand me. And you understand that I'm coming into my adulthood. And that me and you can have a conversation. Me and you can have an understanding, and it be more than just, okay, here. You get homework, bye, out of my face. Because teachers tell you to come to their office, but then when you do, it's basically just a real dry interaction. …Um, on a scale of one to ten, I'll give them, maybe I go six, over halfway, because I don't really talk to everyone from school, at least not teacher-wise. But from all staff members I've met, they've all treated me just the same. I have met one LGBT staff member. That's like my road dog. Even though she is a staff member, we can talk about anything. She's like the auntie that I always wanted. She is always there for me. Anybody else that I've met, they always welcome me with open arms. They speak
to me about my life. They actually care. They want to hear about what's going on. They want to make sure I'm safe. Make sure I'm okay. If they catch anybody even slightly thinking that they want to say something about me, they are attacking them right off the bat. Um, even with the straight teachers, straight staff members, they all have my back when it comes down to it. I haven't run into any homophobic staff members. I haven't run into any staff members that attack me for being gay or just didn't like me. It was always a good vibe for me with that. In my dorm, I actually got close with the man over it. The RD, and I got cool with the man that watches it at night. They never treated me differently. They always talk to me. I was cool with the RAs. I never did anything wrong. And plus, since I was the designated gay boy in the dorm, they knew I wasn't going to do nothing with girls, so they would always be like, you can gone and go up with your company. We know nothing is going to happen, so you can gone up with your homegirls and stuff like that. So, like sometimes the boys would get mad because I had certain special privileges. (Student D)

So, it's one thing to have a male teacher, and for him to be talking with all the straight boys, and it's always, you know, football, sports, this and that. Or, I had a teacher, anytime he be speaking like girls. I mean, boys if you get a wife, or boys when you got a girlfriend. And I'm like, you kind of. You got to be careful when you say things like that because you do have LGBT students, and you never remix it or you never fix it to the point where I feel comfortable. Which I'm not saying single me out for everything. I'm not saying you have to make everything specially organized for me, but it would just be nice to be thought of from time to
time. And it would be great if I seen somebody who was like me who I don't have
to walk on eggshells with because I don't know your thoughts. …So, it's like, it
makes it difficult, but we had LGBT staff members more, I would have more
people that I can go to. I would have more staff members that I would feel
comfortable asking for a letter of recommendation. I would have more staff
members that I feel comfortable being with alone, because it's times where you
want to go to a teacher's room; especially if it's a heterosexual male, and it's like
sometimes they don't want to even hand you your paper because they scared of
the fact that you might touch their hand. It's like, dude, come on. (Student D)
Oh, well, in terms of people that I do know, they are respectful. I know there is a
transgender student, and once they started transitioning, the professor respected
their pronouns and respected the name they chose to use for themselves. So, I feel
like they are respectful and supportive. (Student F)
I would say so between the students. Not so, I don't know if the faculty because
we are in Mississippi, the small, rural state. And a lot of people like to bring with
them the way they grew up. They have that, just very embedded in their brain.
Not very willing to look at it through other people's eyes. And you can see how
like, it will come off to them if you like, try to be yourself and they don't like it.
You can see it. Like all in their demeanor. So, I would say, for staff, I think the
student body is pretty embracing and inclusive, but for staff, I would like them to
be more open and just accepting that this is the normal now. We're in 2020.
Everybody's coming to themselves. Everything is very much different now. So, I
would like for them to evolve with the times. (Student G)
So, this semester I have two teachers who are really supportive. They are there for me when I need them. No matter what, they are there for me. But in general, I never have spoke to them about my personal life. We really just talk about the studies and keep it moving. So, like I said, I have two professors this semester who are supportive. And one of them is my advisor. So, my paper for grad school, I am going to write about the black experience of being LGBTQ. My advisor thought it was a great topic, and he told me that if I needed anything to let him know. (Student H)

Um, honestly, from my experience, they treat me the same. They welcome me. The faculty, the police officers, coaches; they treat everybody the same. We even had on the XXXXXX team a boy, you know, he was gay. And did our coach actually treat him differently? No, my coach didn’t treat him differently. He treated everybody the same. Um, but this is only my perspective. 

Like I said, they’re big on bullying on campus. They are against bullying. So, most definitely, they’re gonna address it. If they are making fun of someone that is gay or whatever, they are going to address it. The teacher is not going to keep teaching. They are going to stop class and address it for sure. They’re going to address the issues and you are going to be up out of there. They’re gonna do something about it, regardless of anything for sure. (Student J)

Additionally, Student C discusses with the researcher a time when she witnessed faculty members ignore students making homophobic comments during an open assembly as well as a separate time when a faculty member made a homophobic comment towards her within the classroom setting at Mississippi Valley State University.
And it's just, it's one thing for it to be like under the rug, but it's like open and outward, you know, the faculty or the organization advisors to not saying anything about the blatant disrespect of a student's expression.

Student H also shares an example of a time when he witnessed a faculty member engage in homophobia rather than intervene within the classroom setting at Jackson State University.

I don't think they're successful at all. Honestly, I don't even think they try. So last summer, I was in a Spanish class and like, a guy was saying, "oh, that's gay". He wasn't talking to me, but I was like, "what's gay about it? You can't say it is gay if you don't really know what gay is unless you are gay, then I can really say anything." The teacher just laughed it off. I was like, you're not going to say anything?" That's not something anyone should just be able to say. Like, you can't say that that's gay, if you don't know what gay is. So, I mean, I wasn't distraught or anything. I was just like, this bitch here. She doesn’t know what the fuck she is talking about, because like, she didn't say anything and like, it just wasn't comfortable situation for me personally.

Some participants also voiced concerns for not having diverse faculty and staff at their institutions. These participants feel that diverse staff would benefit the LGBTQ student community. Student I perceive Jackson State University as being unsupportive of LGBTQ faculty and staff; and therefore, she believes LGBTQ faculty and staff at JSU feel compelled to remain closeted.

Even to say I don't, I don't want to say like the, the executive administration is homophobic, but to have a campus, a college campus and not have diversity in the
staff. Like, I don't know if it's, if we have faculty that are just not open, but to have like nobody on campus that identifies with certain populations of your student body, that's like really what it's like confusing to me.

Because we don't have any faculty that you know, are a part of the community. We do have faculty that will support us. Don't get me wrong, we do have faculty that support us and who are there for us, but their representation is not there. And it's not there in a way that it can be seen. Like, like in like, student, what do you call it, like in student affairs, like people that interact with students the most? No representation; it's not talked about, um, I just don't feel like students are supported in that manner, in like coming from faculty. We did just have our intramural sports director; she just was hired and she's open openly gay. But this is an it's like, yeah, this isn't like one aspect and it's not really talked about. Even she doesn't really, you know, talk about, you know, the resources that we have on campus for the LGBTQ+ students. So it's just like, yeah, we do have her, but we don't have people who are in these positions to, you know, create these resources for us; advocating for us, basically, I don't feel like we have people on campus that advocate for us in spaces that we need to be advocated for.

(Student C)

That's a funny question. We knew faculty that were gay, but they never verbalize it. If people could just be free to be who they are, then we would just be free to tell them. Jackson State is so crazy. I don't know if they would even hire someone knowing they are gay. But it's so weird when we talk about gay faculty, because we know they're gay. But I don't think they publicize their gayness to
other people. … Like they can't be. I don't feel like that would be acceptable at all.

We [black community] are not accepting culture wise. (Student I)

Student H also shares a powerful message about one of his professors who describes as a role model.

I would think that one professor is gay. He is really nice. He is passionate about his studies. It's very rare when I say, I want to be like you. So, you know that this person has a very big impact on my personal life. So, I only know one on campus.

I don't know of any other staff on campus that are LGBTQ. (Student H)

Theme Six: LGBTQ Student Resources

Participants of this study strongly demonstrated a need for LGBTQ student resources at their respective HBCUs. Participants feel that there are no spaces on campus to support LGBTQ students nor are there any trained professionals available to meet their needs. Participants share their frustrations and believe that LGBTQ student resources is a step towards providing adequate representation for the LGBTQ student community.

Participants feel a sense of belonging; welcome, when their institution host LGBTQ-related events.

Um, CCC don’t have no, um, resources for the LGBT community, or like anything to kind of help them or make them feel comfortable. (Student A)

Um, well, for example, they had a speed dating thing that was on campus like a month before we left. And I went, and actually, it was for like lesbians, bisexuals, like it wasn’t just for straight people. So, like, that was a good way to make people feel welcome.
I definitely think they should push more LGBT resources because there are people who have family who have disowned them for their sexuality. So, I think if they have more LGBT counseling services, or if they would push the Gay Straight Alliance, um, just those two things, that’s all I could really ask for.

(Student B)

My school is what, almost 70 years old, and we've never had an organization on campus that supports the LGBTQ+ community. We don't have a Gay Straight Alliance, like we don't have things like that. So just having an organization on campus, that's one way to start. Housing is not inclusive at all my campus. And I know a lot of students in the community that opt out of communal and the suites-style living to live in the private room, just so they can be safe and be who they are. And, and that's another thing, you can find like most LGBTQ+ students heavily, either rooming together or rooming by themselves. And I don't think that's fair because you don't get to have the same, you know, like freshman year, how you all mix and mingle in your dorm and stuff. You don't, you don't feel comfortable like that.

Give us, like, a resource center, a safe space on campus. Um, just allow us to be able. Just allow us a space on campus where we can first feel comfortable. And once we're comfortable, and we can be ourselves wholly, and just have like, the resources that we need to thrive in school, because being an LGBTQ+ student, in this day and age is hard, then put the classes on top of that, and then, like college is a social experiment, basically, so just all of those factors, it can be overwhelming. So, a resource center that can serve that type of, those types of
experiences, even though we do have that on campus it's not like for like
LGBTQ+ students. So, a resource center. And from there, I feel like once we're
comfortable, and we're seen and heard, then we can do, you know, we can go
about other students, you know, being able to talk about it, being able to see us
and have that awareness of the community, if we just had a space on campus
where it's like, hey, this is where you can come and just kick back and chill
without being, feeling like you have to shrink yourself, or you know, that you're
being watched or something. So just a space. Let's just start with a space. Just
give us a space of resources that we can use to thrive. (Student C)

School began to be a lot more comfortable, because I found an outlet that allowed
me to be who I was, allow me to go into an environment where I wasn't judge, or
at least I didn't feel like I was cast out or to feel ashamed. Because I had a
roommate when I first got to Jackson State, and they shared with me their
personal information in regards to their sexuality, and they shared a lot more
personal information with me. They had to go off campus to get that help. They
had to go away from campus to get those needs and speak to the people that they
needed to help them with whatever it was. The campus does not provide that. And
I know this because I had a vehicle and I took that person wherever they needed
to go. My roommate shared with me that he had become positive.

But what I would enforce would be like, they have a center for students
who feel like they want to commit suicide, or students who are in an abusive
relationship. They have centers for that, but they don't have centers for students
who feel they are questioning their sexuality or questioning their identity. They
don't have it. …I'm going to talk to LGBTQ rep or provost at the school? They shouldn't feel like, oh, I have to sneak through the back door there. There are ways to do that. So just have an office on campus. Just have a building, you know, and students don't have to be seen going there. They can make an appointment. The provost maybe can come to them. They could allow students voices to be heard, and they could allow students to create their own, I guess, alliance. Allow students to be comfortable while at your institution, in their in their sexuality. Just give them somewhere to go. Give them a panel or some type of outlet in the social world so that they can say, you know, I've had the opportunity to speak with whoever about it. Because there are people who work at Jackson State, more than likely willing to work with LGBTQ students, if they are not one themselves.

(Student E)

There's definitely a discrepancy not having the same, you know, structures in place to care for queer students doesn't exist? It doesn't exist. If they say it does exist, just from like having the counseling center, that's not adequate enough because, yeah, people need like something or at least like one specialist that can help, you know, assistance students with their identity, you know, challenges or whatnot. So, yeah, that is definitely a discrepancy and something that doesn't really exist and probably something that will be helpful if it was put in place.

(Student F)

Um, I think everything has been pretty great, actually. Probably more LGBTQ representation, because I, it's very, I don't know how do I say it. It's not very shown on our campus. I'm glad that you're doing it for your campus, but it's not
very shown at our campus. LGBTQ. I don't think there's anything I really want to change besides that though.

Probably a safe space. Because it is hard. Not even for me, just for other people seeing it. It's hard, and for people who haven't come out. This is a time for them to explore themselves. And they need a safe space to feel comfortable and not judged. (Student G)

I haven't got any emails or seen any posters or flyers about LGBTQ people in general. I don't think Jackson State has any LGBTQ alliances or clubs or anything like that. So, I don't think that's available to us. I think that if you go to school at Jackson State, we literally just go to school.

They just need to make a safe space. It doesn't have to be a really big space. It just needs to be a space where we can go if anything happens, or something goes wrong with you personally, like, it doesn't matter. Like, it doesn't matter whether it's sexuality wise, or class wise or personality wise. It's just a safe space. It's a space where you know you can come and talk and you don't have to worry about anything else. (Student H)

Whether they establish a safe place in regards, it doesn't have to be suicide, but it can just be like, are you having conflict? You know, would you like to come in and meet with our counselor? Oftentimes, they don't want that to be people that are in a school setting, that they're gonna walk across the street and see, you know. Some people are very closeted about their sexuality, and you have to allow for those people as well. And people don't want to be labeled, you know. (Student I)
Honestly, I would like to see, you know, um, resources, like, you know, like I said, since some people might not feel like going to some counselors. I feel like if it was a resource, I feel like it’ll be something like this, somebody you can actually talk to. If somebody’s feeling some type of way, it could be like a group, class, or meetings we can have to express our thoughts or how we are feeling.

People like us, some people might have stories behind why they are the way they are, or some people might not have stories of why they are the way they are. I feel like would have groups for us, you know, to express our thoughts of how we feel, or are we getting treated the same or, you know, or talk about stuff that goes on at home, like I say, like, you know my perspective of how to, like, actually come out or tell your parents. Because you never know, if they are going to accept you or not accept you. Some people may be gay and their parents are ready to put them out or treat them differently than their other siblings, or just treat them bad.

(Student J)

Theme Seven: LGBTQ Awareness

The participants were very concerned about their institutions giving them a voice, hearing their concerns, and bring awareness to the campus community. Participants feel as though they are being ignored. Participants also believe that part of the HBCU community’s ignorance results from not educating the community and promoting LGBTQ awareness. The participants’ statement above and below strongly illustrate why LGBTQ awareness initiatives are needed on HBCU campuses.

Student A feels that promoting awareness must begin with leadership.
The President, he’s religious also because he’s like a pastor. And you know, so with him, it’s like he’s not going to have nothing like that. But it’s a topic that needs to be discussed and is not being discussed. I would suggest that they hold more, well, have more, you know, seminars or discussions with the LGBTQ community at Coahoma.

…Nothing. None of that. Being gay is not a topic at CCC. They will discuss everything else, from police brutality to racism, so like, they will discuss all major topics except for LGBTQ. They didn’t look at it as a gay thing; even though, it was gay. All they did was like just punish the dude, and then after that, they didn’t want it to brought up again. (Student A)

Student C describes her experience at Mississippi Valley State University. She discovered what diversity and inclusion looks like at HBCUs when she attended a Human Rights Campaign Summit aimed at advancing LGBTQ awareness at HBCUs. It was then that she discovered the various resources and initiatives HBCUs around the world are doing to improve the quality of education for students at their respective HBCUs. During the Summit, Student C was able to network and discuss concerns amongst other fellow LGBTQ students. Student C believes the Summit motivated her to do more on her campus. Below are her thoughts.

So, within this HBCU experience, you still have community, we have, I feel like our international students get, you know, more resources and opportunities to have their voices heard than the LGBTQ+ community on my campus? And it's just like, I just don't understand, like, why can't we have those and that's why I like I kind of the whole, I don't even want to say recruitment because that kind of
sounds bad, but just like gathering more students who identify, so we can have, like this diverse voice… I feel like I have to speak about it, because that kind of deters a person if they feel like this campus, this school doesn't have, you know, the support or resources to support people like me, they don't want to come to the campus. So that's kind of like recruitment and retention there too.

So last year, I had the opportunity to go to the human rights campaigns HBCU summit and that was like really life changing for me, and I really realized that my campus was very behind on supporting students like me and giving us the resources. We're not seen or talked about on my campus. So just talking to them about how, you know, their organizations ran, how they're relationships with their faculty, and stuff like that, I realized like, yeah, we really getting the short end of the stick at Valley. …So maybe it's that, but then I'm like, no, because like the, the mindset of the students on campus, the community, the faculty, you know, not to the to divert from this conversation, but just holding events on campus. …And to hold events bringing awareness to, you know, a part of me that I identify as was hard in certain organizations. So, like, certain, I just, I can't really, really explain it without just being upset about it, but it was it was just a lot. So, it's just like, even though it's inclusive, but it is not inclusive, but it's not hateful. Like it's not totally like we hate the LGBTQ+ community, but when you're not seen or heard, that's hurtful, you know? I don't mean to cry. I'm sorry. Simply because they don't know, and when you don't know, you can be ignorant towards something that you don't know. Then the student, like once you bring awareness to campus, I feel like the more that students know about us, and, you know, can understand like
pronouns, that's a huge thing on my campus, that people just neglect, like, I didn't like being able to let people use the pronouns or identify how they want to identify like, that's just like something that you would think people would understand. But on my campus, it's just like, nobody can grasp the concept.

So just being aware of the different types of identities that you have on your campus and not being afraid to, you know, serve those students, even if it's like, contrary to popular norms or beliefs. That's what really makes it an inclusive HBCU and then having those people in the room to make these decisions; whether it is based on gender, race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation; like just having these people there, that can speak on behalf of how they identify, not people, like, I love a good ally, I really do. Don't get me wrong; but sometimes, you need the voice that comes from the source, you know? So yeah, that would be what makes a very diverse and inclusive HBCU campus.

Student D describes the LGBTQ awareness efforts at Mississippi Valley State University as non-existent. Student D said, “…No, they don't talk about it. Like, it's basically, you would think we were ghost. But it's just not addressed.” Student D shares more insight regarding his experience below.

They can open their eyes and realize that we exist, for one. It starts with acknowledgment. It starts with saying, okay, we have LGBT students here. We're not gonna allow you to walk around and bully them. We're not gonna allow you to walk around, just because we feel comfortable with wearing a crop top, meaning that it should be acceptable for everybody to sit there and laugh and through jokes. Which I'm not saying it's not gonna happen because, like I say, it's
a part of that roasting experience. But when it gets to a point where it is downright discrimination, say something. Um, acknowledge us to the fact that when we are in the classroom, true enough, the norm is heteronormative statements, but we are there. Take some time to include us, and to listen.

Come up with events, that even though it's a few of us, we are gay, we also have allies who also enjoy those events. The people who don't understand gay people, teach them. Because I've had so many people on campus not understand me, and just be like, oh Student D, explain it to me. They may say, how did you know you were gay, etcetera. But I feel comfortable knowing that, you at least feel comfortable with me explaining it to you, and you want to know. They can start by acknowledging us. Start hosting events where you're explaining to people that gay people are a part of history as well. Because when we talk about black history at our school, with being a HBCU. Yeah, we are going to talk about the black people, but do y'all not know that the black gay people really were a part of it. Like, Martin Luther King's right-hand man was a homosexual male, and his story has never been told. And none of my teachers have ever let that be known. And it's like, everybody thinks, oh, if you're gonna be a leader for the black people, you have to be straight. You have to be masculine. You have to be this, and when I say, talking masculinity at a HBCU is working my last nerve man. Start by understanding that this stuff has to go. Like, just because you're a boy, don't mean you got to play football, baseball, kick rocks and kiss every girl. That's not what this is. Like, accept us. And even if you don't accept what we do, accept us as people. Like, don't just look over us. And if you're gonna have people
come to the school to speak, can we at least get a homosexual speaker for once or twice out of the year. Can we get somebody who is an inspiration to us? Like, that's all I ask for.

Student E describes his experience at Jackson State University as a, “boy meets girl type of environment.”

I think everyone there is pretty much boy meets girl type of environment. They don't really, I don't really see a lot of communication with LGBT people. I don't think that there is a negligence there. I don't think that people don't like LGBT. It's just not pushed. There is no welcome or there's no diversity. So, for me, it's pretty much hetero driven.

I would want them to know that your college is a lot more diverse than you think. It goes beyond skin tone. It goes beyond diverse learning system. It goes beyond just sports and activities. Because in every activity and every organization that you have on campus, I can guarantee you, it's at least one LGBTQ person. So that one person shouldn't have to go an alternative route to get the things that they want, the things that they need.

Student F believes Jackson State University could also do more to recognize the LGBTQ student community. She believes including LBGTQ students in events, or implemented a curriculum centered around LGBTQ students would be beneficial.

I feel they could do more to like, make safe spaces for queer students and, you know, be more like, inclusive on that front and not just center certain events that certain type of kids like to do, you know. Maybe make more of an effort to be more like, inclusive and like, center queer students also. Center them within like
events or center them just in general. Just recognize that they’re there. Maybe that would just help.

Student I believe there is priority placed on recognizing a number of initiatives; however, she doesn’t believe Jackson State University sees LGBTQ awareness as one. What has a HBCU done? Nothing that I've seen, but I'm not on campus a lot. But I do know we have GLBT students within our program in the School of XXXXX and we don't recognize Gay Pride or anything. We recognize XXXXX Week. We recognize XXXXX and XXXXX. We recognize all that, but we don't do Pride.

No, no.

Student J is reluctant to say that Coahoma Community College should focus its attention on LGBTQ awareness because she is afraid there may be backlash from the campus community.

Honestly, from my perspective, if you like try to have the spotlight just on us, it’s going to be talk on the side. It’s going to be like, dang, they doing more for them than they are doing for us. Like, yes, this is a big thing going around the world right now. There is a lot of discrimination. Some people feel some type of way about this stuff. So, if they try to do something different, the kids that’s not, the straight kids that are not gay or whatever, are going to feel some type of way.

There’s nothing I feel like they should do different. Honestly, the pride stuff, they don’t even have to do that. They don’t even have to do that. Because the other people might, you know, they going to feel some type of way. I feel like they are going to feel some type of way. So, like, I’m actually comfortable with
what they’re doing now. I feel like they’re doing a good job at it, honestly.

(Student J)

Ancillary Findings

*Mental Health*

The researcher also discovered a pattern during thematic analysis where mental health appeared noteworthy, but it was not included as a major theme because codes related to this topic: anxiety, depression, and suicide, were only discovered in the transcripts a few times, yet were cited enough and grounded in the literature to examine further.

Some of the participants shared their thoughts regarding mental health illnesses during their interviews. One participant shared his personal experience battling mental health as he struggled to find himself. He also described how his experience living in the residence hall often triggered his anxiety. Another participant spoke about his fear of being “cast out and talked about” and related his fears to a mental breakdown he suffered while attending college. One participant, who is also a mental health professional, wants to raise mental health awareness. She shared her professional experience with treating mental health and how the illness negatively impact the LGBTQ community. Their testimony is noteworthy as the literature suggest that a negative campus climate has led to anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, poor academic performance and more (Goodman, 2017). Excerpts from Participants C, D, E and I interview transcripts are below.

So at Valley, the only resources that I can really, I don't even think we have resources because even though they might say we have resources, like when it comes to like, mental health or safe sex, or you know, like the basic things that
you have on all college campuses, it's not inclusive of the lives that we live, you know. So, like, we don't have like our mental health professionals, I don't think they're prepared to, you know, help us or talk to us. So even though they say it's there, I don't think it's adequate. That's what it is. I don't think it's adequate.

(Student C)

I had in my mind that I was gonna say mental health because I don't too much battle mental health, but I count depression as mental health, and I went through that at an early age, um, battling my sexuality. Not knowing whether I was going to hell or not. Not knowing whether I was okay, you know, okay. Was I normal, etcetera, etcetera. (Student D)

And it was even worse, like, we would have hall meetings, and the RD and the man who watch the dorm at night, they would always be looking at me to make sure I'm alright because I have anxiety, but it's not a bad anxiety. It's like it's just something that like builds up only when I'm around all boys or something like that. (Student D)

So, when I got to Jackson State, I did that. I hide myself because I was afraid of being cast out. I was afraid of being talked about and that was kind of one of the reasons why, you know, I didn't continue my education in the normal four-year path. I had to take some breaks. I had mental breakdowns. I had, um, family issues. (Student E)

Mental health is real. GLBT people, they have large levels of mental health concerns because of acceptance. And some of them do have comorbidities and some of them are gender dysphoria. (Student I)
By deploying a phenomenological approach, findings reaffirm the notion that a negative campus climate, including but not limited to, an unwelcoming environment, prejudice, homophobia, differential treatment, among other topics discussed above, could impact LGBTQ students’ health and academic outcomes.

Summary of the Findings

Using a phenomenological approach to thematic analysis, the researcher identified seven themes to help answer the proposed research questions. Theme one: reveals how the participants perceive the climate at their institutions; a majority of whom felt their institutions were unwelcoming and accepting of their lifestyles. Theme two: describes what the participants have witnessed on their campuses and how those observations have shaped their feelings concerning campus safety. A majority of the participants felt their campuses were not safe and cited several incidents that supported the same including but not limited to assaults, rape, and firearm-related incidents. Theme three: demonstrates how religious views have negatively impacted the participants’ experiences at their selected HBCUs. The findings suggest that religions play a major factor in how some higher education professionals fulfill the institutions’ mission. Theme four: establishes how homophobia has impacted the selected HBCUs. The findings reveal a homophobic-enriched and toxic environment that is not conducive to learning. Theme five: reveals how the participants perceive the faculty and staff culture at their selected HBCUs. Though the findings varied, it is clear that homophobia and prejudice exist amongst faculty and staff. More specifically, the findings illustrate how LGBTQ students are being underrepresented, and often times mistreated, inside and outside the classroom. Theme six: demonstrates the need for LGBTQ student resources on HBCU campuses.
Theme seven: illustrates the importance of LGBTQ awareness efforts and demonstrates how the targeted HBCUs are failing to advance efforts to educate the campus community and promote tolerance. The theme mental health was also discovered during the phenomenological analysis.

The researcher believes these findings lay the foundation for understanding the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). However, this study intended to answer specific research questions, so Chapter V organizes and further analyzes findings from aforesaid themes to answer the study’s two research questions.
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt using a phenomenological approach. The study’s findings and overarching themes were discussed in Chapter IV and included the following: (1) perception of campus climate, (2) campus safety, (3) religion and the HBCU, (4) homophobia and the HBCU, (5) perception of faculty and staff culture, (6) LGBTQ student resources, and (7) LGBTQ awareness. By employing a thematic analysis known as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to discover themes, the researcher was able to analyze what LGBTQ students experienced at selected HBCUs in the state of Mississippi. Analysis of the discovered themes affirmed the theory of care framework related to open communication and critical reflection. The themes also highlighted elements related to the research questions:

(1) How do the selected LGBTQ students perceive the HBCU college experience?

(2) What can HBCU institutions do to create a more diverse and inclusive environment where LGBTQ students feel safe and valued?

In this chapter, the researcher will use the aforesaid themes to answer the study’s research questions, discuss implications, and areas of future research.

Research Question 1

How do the selected LGBTQ students perceive the HBCU college experience?

The aforesaid themes highlight two main ways in which the selected participants perceive their HBCU college experience – either positive or negative. While each participant highlighted pros and cons about their respective institutions, the findings
reveal more cons than pros, especially when considering the LGBTQ aspect of their experiences.

*Campus Climate*

Nine out of ten participants viewed their campus’s climate to be negative. More specifically, these LGBTQ students perceive their campus’s climate as “eh”, “judgmental”, “heavy on religion”, “unwelcoming”, “prejudice,” “hetero-driven,” “close-minded,” “narrow-minded”, “cringing”, “eye-opening”, “an experience”, “complexity”, “bureaucracy”, and “uncomfortable”.

The findings illustrate that a majority of the participants do not feel a sense of belonging at their HBCU. They do not feel accepted nor respected as a member of the campus community. One participant described the LGBTQ community at his institution as “ghost”. Another participant described her institution as a campus “riddled with scandal”.

These findings are consistent with the literature. Lenning (2017), noted that LGBTQ students faced unique challenges related to the culture and campus climate. Further, Taylor (2015) opined that hostile and negative climate toward the LGBTQ students was evidenced by perceptions and experiences of those students on their campuses. Garvey et al. (2017) stated that campus climate was a central focal point for many LGBTQ students.

*Campus Safety*

A majority of the research participants perceive their college campuses as unsafe. One participant described their campus as “dangerous”. Those who viewed their campuses negatively shared several examples to support their perceptions including but
not limited to sexual assaults, fights, incidents involving firearms, rape, bullying, and harassment. In most cases the participants were witnesses to the violent acts; however, in some cases, the participants referred to themselves as victims.

Findings show that some participants were afraid to report crimes in fear of retaliation or further mistreatment. Others report not being comfortable approaching campus staff, including campus police, to report incidents. Participants also discussed times when they witnessed complaints being “ignored”, “brushed under the rug”, or quickly dismissed. Some participants reported feeling “silenced”. Participants described their institution’s police operations as inadequate; citing minimal police presence on campus; weak security check and verification processes whereby campus police rarely check identification at entry checkpoints, and the failure to properly investigate and adjudicate crimes.

Alternatively, it is important to mention that some participants did perceive campus safety as sufficient. These participants stated that their campuses provided adequate security including in the residence halls, offered personal escorts to and from various locations at night, and addressed any and all incidents promptly. Several participants who view campus safety positively said that they felt comfortable approaching campus police. In fact, some participants described campus police as friendly, caring, and nurturing. These findings are also consistent with the literature. Nguyen et al. (2018) opined that research related to LGBTQ students recognized higher education as being mainly hostile, chilly, and discriminatory environments.
Religion and the HBCU

The findings suggest that participants viewed religion as a problem at their campuses. Participants felt as though some faculty and staff allowed their personal beliefs to overshadow their ability to perform their jobs successfully. Others stated that they felt that some faculty and staff brought their personal beliefs to work and attempted to “push” their religion on others. One participant described her feelings regarding the matters as “…we are black, Southern, Christian, kind of conservative, etcetera” (Student F). Another student perceived her campus as religion-focused and hetero-driven. She said, “with Mississippi being the southern small Baptist state that it is, everybody assumes that if you don’t come out as anything, they assume you are just straight” (Student G). Student I stated the following, “…They’re rigid in their thinking. It’s almost like they move the Baptist church into the school, or the AME church into the school.”

Participants felt frustrated at times when encountering faculty and staff who they perceived as judging them based on their own religious views. Student D stated, “…And I get so sick and tired of running into people that, “I’m Christian. I don’t agree with what you do, but I’m not gonna, you know, disrespect you as a person”. Student A said, “Well, simple. It’s all about their personal beliefs. They don’t want to, you know, go against their religion or have people at their church look at what they’re doing at the school, and you know, kind of look at them differently.” These participants described their experience as uncomfortable at times.

Several participants also reflected back on their childhood and spoke of their time as children and attending church in the South. They changed their religious views along the way as they struggled to find themselves. They didn’t support the religious views of
their spiritual leaders, who strongly condemned homosexuality. Some participants spoke of times when they changed their religion only to attend other churches who had the same views, ultimately leading to them no longer attending church but finding new ways to become closer with Christ. Student A did not believe his institution would make changes to better serve the LGBTQ students on campus. He explained that he felt rejected every time he told a faculty or staff member that he was gay and regretted sharing his truth.

Similar to the above, other participants shared the same feelings as Student A. The findings demonstrate that others shared many of the same views. They felt like they were rejected and never accepted and constantly judged. Many of the participants stated that they did feel comfortable discussing their sexuality with others on campus, including their peers in many instances.

These findings are also consistent with the literature insofar as a majority of Black Americans view homosexuality as wrong and many HBCUs were founded by religious organizations including the Baptist, AME, and Catholic Church (Mobley & Johnson, 2015), and that frequent attendance at such sanctuaries often projected increased sexual prejudice and less support for civil rights for LGBTQ people, particularly true for African Americans (Dessel et al. 2016).

*Homophobia and the HBCU*

Every participant in this study believes homophobia is prevalent at their college campuses. Participants shared instances of students being “bashed” in public, during open forums and assemblies. Some participants described their experiences as “blatant disrespect.” The researcher observed several participants become emotional. “…So, like, certain, I just, I can't really, really explain it without just being upset about it, but it was it
was just a lot. So, it's just like, even though it's inclusive, but it is not inclusive, but it's not hateful. Like it's not totally like we hate the LGBTQ+ community, but when you're not seen or heard, that's hurtful, you know? I don't mean to cry. I'm sorry” (Student C)

There was a discernible trend as it related to homophobic acts against LGBTQ males and females. The findings reveal that a majority of the participants perceived male LGBTQ students to receive harsher treatment from heterosexual male students than their LGBTQ female counterparts. In fact, differential treatment amongst LGBTQ male and female students was documented many times throughout the thematic analysis phase.

Male participant spoke of times when they were purposefully ignored by their dormmates and classmates; when they would make homophobic slurs such as “faggot” and “sissy”; and when they were forced into verbal altercations in order to prove their strength.

Female participants also described frightening experiences involving their LGBTQ male friends. One participant shared that her male friend’s roommate would look him out of his room, lash out homophobic slurs, and threaten to rape him. Another participant shared how her male friend was raped by an RA in his assigned building while the male friend was under the influence of alcohol.

The literature further support these findings. Research conducted by Kolbert et al. (2018) reveals that LGBTQ students do not feel safe at school as a result of being bullied among other homophobic acts. The percentages reported by Kolbert et al. indicate a large number of LGBTQ have been negatively affected by homophobia behavior.

*Perception of Faculty and Staff Culture*

A majority of the participants viewed the culture of the faculty and staff as unsupportive. Some participants revealed that faculty and staff would engage in
homophobia as well as ignore it inside and outside the classroom. These participants perceive the faculty and staff on their campuses as disrespectful and judgmental. They feel as if some faculty and staff ignore their concerns and attempt to silence them. They view administration and student support service employees as dismissive and find it extremely hard at times to communicate. Some of the male participants who share the above-views state that they do not feel comfortable being in a room with male faculty alone. Others feel faculty and staff are not approachable.

Alternatively, there are some participants who consider faculty and staff at their institutions to be very supportive, approachable, caring, and nurturing. Some of these participants described their interactions with faculty and staff as being friendly. One participant identified a staff member at his institution as “family”. He described her as “like an auntie”. Another participant identified one of his professors as his “role model”. These participants feel faculty have control of their classrooms and will promptly dismiss any misconduct. Student J confidently stated that, “They are going to stop class and address it for sure. They’re going to address the issues and you are going to be up out of there. They’re gonna do something about it, regardless of anything for sure.

The literature suggests minority students tend to perform at a higher average when they identify with their professors (Linley et al. 2016) and higher education professionals who work with students outside the classroom have the ability to establish campus spaces where students feel safe and welcomed which foster student success (McLaughlin, 2017). These findings demonstrate why it is more important that higher education professionals approach this matter more seriously and provide support for the LGBTQ students they serve.
Campus Resources

The participants perceived their campuses to lack adequate resources to support LGBTQ students. The participants feel that by refusing to address the issue, their institutions are showing their disregard for their needs. Some participants feel as if the institutions are focusing entirely too much on other special populations of students. Participants feel that LGBTQ resources are needed to support the many challenges the LGBTQ student community face on campus. Some students have shared their experiences trying to communicate with staff about implementing resources, while others do not believe trying is worth it.

LGBTQ Awareness

Participants believe their HBCUs do not value them as students, paying customers, and future alumni. Participants feel their institutions are not concerned with educating the college community and raising LGBTQ awareness. Participants state that they feel ignored often, not heard, overlooked, underrepresented, and not priority.

Research Question 2

What can HBCU institutions do to create a more diverse and inclusive environment where LGBTQ students feel safe and valued?

The participants of this study are asking to be heard, understood, and made relevant. The themes provide clear direction for answering this question. The researcher examines each theme closely below.

Campus Climate

The data show that participants are asking for their institutions to develop a climate where they feel accepted and not judged. They are asking for their institutions to
accept new ideas and be willing to change in order to serve all students – including LGBTQ students. The participants want to feel as if they can walk on campus freely in their skin and live their truth without persecution or ridicule. They want to feel a part of the experience.

_Campus Safety_

The findings reveal that the participants want to feel safe on campus; in their residence hall rooms, walking to class, or while arriving back on campus at night. They want to know that campus police are working for them equally as much as they are for other students on campus. The participants are asking for protection from their classmates, dormmates, and others (including faculty and staff) who seek to harm them.

Participants are asking for their concerns to be addressed. They are wanting their reports of violence to be investigated and adjudicated. The participants want to feel comfortable around campus law enforcement officials. They asking for campus police officers who are approachable, who value them as students, and who respect them as human-beings.

_Religion and the HBCU_

The findings reveal that participants are religious too. They are not foreign nor naïve to recognize that HBCUs are heavily enriched and connected to the church; however, participants are asking for understanding, acceptance, or at the very least tolerance and respect. The findings reveal that too many times the participants have had to listen to faculty, staff, and students’ opinions regarding religion without any regard for their religious beliefs. The participants are asking their HBCUs to either celebrate
religion holistically or reframe from celebrating it at all for the sake of “all” students they aim to serve.

*Homophobia and the HBCU*

Participants are asking for respect and understanding. The findings appear to suggest that the target HBCUs are not taking bullying, harassment, and other violent crimes seriously. Participants feel unsafe. Participants want to feel accepted and welcomed on their campuses.

*Perception of Faculty and Staff Culture*

Participants are asking for faculty and staff cooperation. Participants are asking faculty and staff to respect them and treat them as equals. Participants want faculty and staff who are approachable and who are willing to assist them. Participants want faculty and staff to refrain from sharing the personal opinions about the LGBTQ lifestyle unless asked. Male participants want to feel safe being alone in an office with male faculty and staff. Participants want to be able to talk with their advisors and know that they are getting the best recommendations. Participants are demanding high-quality services from both faculty and staff. The findings suggest that participants want to see a more diverse and inclusive campus where more openly LGBTQ faculty and staff work. In essence, the participants want to see more LGBTQ representation. The findings suggest that LGBTQ students feel more comfortable interacting with LGBTQ faculty and staff.

*LGBTQ Awareness*

The findings suggest that participants want to feel equally represented on their campuses. They are asking for their campuses to raise LGBTQ awareness throughout the

campus community. Many of the participants welcomed the opportunity to sit and speak freely about their sexuality and educate others on their campuses without retaliation.

What Do the Findings Mean?

Overall, the findings of this study reveal a few important takeaway points. First, the majority of participants in this study perceive the campus climate at their institutions as negative. The target HBCUs must explore ways to change the mindset of these participants as well as other LGBTQ students at their institutions who may have the same perception.

The findings suggest that the majority of participants perceive their campuses as unsafe. This is a major problem and warrants immediate concern. For example, one participant shares that her male friend was sexually assaulted and nothing was done to address the matter. The researcher finds this significant and further recommends that all target institutions closely examine its policies, procedure, and practices related to campus security.

Religion is perceived to be a problem at the targeted institutions. Campus leaders should take this opportunity to strategically develop a way or ways to bridge what is perceived to be a divide. Further, all of the research participants shared their experiences of witnessing or being victim to homophobic acts on their campuses. These findings also suggest that the target institutions are unsafe and unwelcoming to LGBTQ students. Once again, a discerning trend is being developed; one that deserve immediate attention.

The findings suggest that there is a negative perception of the faculty and staff at each of the targeted institutions. A majority of the participants concerns are related to homophobia, personal beliefs overshadowing job responsibilities, and lack of concerns.
It’s critically important that students feel a sense of belonging and having highly trained and professional faculty and staff will ensure that all students, regardless of race, sex, disability, religions, sexual orientation, etc., are served equally.

The findings also reveal a negative perception related to the campus resources. The participants feel their institutions do not have adequate resources to support their needs. Participants also describe their institution as unsupportive; having a lack of resources to support the students affirms the notion that participants are being underserved.

Lastly, institutions should focus their attention on promoting LGBTQ awareness as the findings overwhelmingly illustrate a lack of support for such initiatives. The research participants see implementing LGBTQ awareness initiatives as a way to address many of the aforementioned themes including but not limited to homophobia and campus safety. More importantly, the participants are wanting to see more commitment from their campus leaders.

Implications

There are several major implications for higher education administrator, faculty, and support staff at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The Gay Rights Movement has gained momentum, and by all indications, the movement is here to stay. New federal and state regulations geared towards improving the quality of life for the LGBTQ community around continue. As noted above, the most recent federal regulation steered towards equality occurred this year with the historical ruling in Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia (2020). This study’s first major contribution is that it provides insight into the challenges facing LGBTQ students at HBCUs in the state of
Mississippi. This is important because this study is the first study that investigates the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the state of Mississippi in an era when gay rights is more frequently examined. Research studies examining the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities is limited. According to Mobley and Johnson (2015), “there are a few existing studies that underscore the experiences of gay or bisexual males and lesbian students who attend HBCUs and the challenges that they face during their undergraduate years” (p. 81).

The study’s findings also provide implications for assisting HBCU college presidents and other higher education practitioners who are interested in exploring the phenomenon in order to gain a better understanding and to develop policies, procedures, and practices designed to improve the HBCU college experience of LGBTQ students. More specifically, the implications may assist higher education practitioners in the following ways: (1) develop recruitment and retention strategies designed to attract and retain LGBTQ students; (2) assess campus safety protocols in an effort to streamline incident reporting processes thereby eliminating potential barriers that may deter LGBTQ students, as well as other students, from reporting campus incidents; (3) develop techniques for implementing community policing within the LGBTQ campus community in an effort to improving the community relations; restoring confidence, and promoting a sense of safety and security; (4) develop training materials used to educate the campus faculty, staff, and students and to create LGBTQ awareness initiatives; (5) develop strategies for eliminate homophobia and promoting a more diverse and inclusive campus community; (6) create assessment tool aimed at enhancing the quality of services in key
areas including but not limited to academic affairs and student services; and (7) develop new strategies for improving diversity and inclusion efforts including but limited to enhancing hiring practices to ensure more LGBTQ faculty and staff are employed.

Further, the study’s findings demonstrate the need for more equality reform at all levels of government. As federal and state lawmakers continue to advocate for equality for all, the findings of this study could strengthen arguments that additional funding is needed at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) designed to develop more research-based programs intended to address the inequalities negatively impacting LGBTQ students.

According to Andrews (2017):

African American Protestants demonstrate more conservative attitudes towards same-sex sexuality than White mainline Protestants and Catholics. In the United States, religion continues to be one of the greatest influences that holds some Americans back from supporting issues and legislation related to same-sex sexuality. (p. 11-12)

When considering the above, the study’s findings also hold implications for future research to closely examine the African American community and the Christian Black church to further determine ways to bridge the profound gap between the African American church and the LGBTQ community while finding ways to address heterosexism.

Additionally, research suggests that a negative campus climate has led to anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, poor academic performance and more (Choi et al., 2013; Goodman, 2017). Therefore, this study’s findings also provide implications for mental
health professionals who seek to address barriers affecting the mental health of LGBTQ students around the world, and especially in African American communities. The findings provide further insight into the phenomenon as it relates to LGBTQ students; particularly LGBTQ African American males and females, and the effects a negative college experience can have on mental health outcomes.

Directions for Future Research

This study examined the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt; more specifically, the state of Mississippi. Previous studies have explored HBCU campus climate and LGBTQ students (Taylor & Francis, 2016), challenging culture norms at HBCUs (Walker & Goings, 2018), social and cultural experiences of gay and lesbian students attending HBCUs (Lewis, 2017), and the impact of safe spaces for LGBTQ students at HBCUs (Coleman, 2016). This study filled the gap in the research by examining the lived experiences of the LGBTQ students at HBCUs in the state of Mississippi. However, limitations of this study exist. The researcher limited the study to public HBCUs in the state of Mississippi; however, the Bible Belt encompasses several states within the Midwest and Southeast region of the United States. The study was also limited by the number of participants who are openly gay and were willing to serve as participants in the study. Therefore, only ten participants from three institutions within the state of Mississippi were used. Although the researcher was able to make inferences about the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at selected HBCUs in Mississippi, future research regarding this topic could compare the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs.
in other Bible Belt states, or at private HBCUs; in-state or otherwise, with the findings from this study.

Summary

In order to make this dissertation practical for higher education administrators, such as college presidents, vice presidents, deans, directors, and professors, the researcher has consolidated a list of lessons gleaned from the research participants. This list may guide higher education practitioners in their efforts to address the LGBTQ inequalities on their respective campuses.

1. The findings suggest that research participants in this study perceive their college campuses as unwelcoming or negative. Higher education professionals, especially college leaders who have the power to affect the most change, must not ignore these students' cry for help. Instead, higher education professionals must assemble teams to review the research, gather the resources, and develop strategies aimed at addressing the negative perceptions of their institutions; reassuring all students – including LGBTQ students that they matter.

2. The findings also suggest that research participants perceive their campus security as ineffective; thus, labeling their campuses as unsafe. The participants’ experiences noted within this study are very significant, and all higher education professionals, especially college presidents and campus law enforcement leaders should consider this noteworthy. Institutions should examine their safety protocols and explore ways to improve community relation efforts with the campus community. Reporting procedures should be
simplified to eliminate barriers and encourage more reporting of campus-related crimes. Campus law enforcement agencies should also explore ways to form partnerships with the LGBTQ student community to foster sense of security.

3. The study’s findings show a need for creating programs on campus aimed at raising LGBTQ awareness and combating homophobia. Participants in this study reiterated their desires to be heard, to be included, and to be equally represented. It is highly important for higher education professionals to affirm their commitment to acknowledging LGBTQ students on their campuses. These students are not asking for the spotlight. They are simply asking others to share it.

4. Research participants also voiced their concerns for campus resources to support their needs. Support services to support LGBTQ students is highly encouraged. Higher education professionals at HBCUs should assigned someone immediately to begin researching what other institutions (i.e., MSIs, PBIs, PWIs, HSIs, etc.) are doing to best serve the needs of their LGBTQ students. College officials should take time to visit other colleges and universities that are identified as ideal models. By visiting the institutions, college officials will be able to gain more insight and get a better picture of the landscape.

5. College officials should also conduct need assessments to begin in their strategic planning process.
6. Townhall forums could be considered great opportunities to engage the students, giving them a forum to voice their concerns and help confront the issues the college may face. It’s also a great opportunity for simple dialogue.

7. Institutions should also assess their non-discrimination policies, procedures, and practices to ensure all guidelines are current.

8. HBCU human resources officials should assess employment protocols to determine whether or not changes are needed to help promote the college’s diversity and inclusion efforts. Often times HR offices do not have standard protocols in place to assist in diversifying hiring practices. One good practice to consider is blind interviews. This process involves redacting any identifying information related to a potential candidate from the interview screening process. This process will ensure all candidates are given a fair opportunity to obtain employment.

9. HBCU college presidents should also make it a priority to meet with their vice presidents responsible for finance and explore ways to allocate funds towards LGBTQ initiatives (including but not limited to creating an office with the sole mission of improving diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus). At many institutions, this office is entitled, the “Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”.

10. Research participants stressed the importance of having a safe space. HBCU leaders should consider building LGBTQ Resource Centers on campus that are aimed at supporting the needs of the LGBTQ campus community.
In addition to the above, HBCU student affairs professionals should be heavily involved in the college’s LGBTQ initiative efforts. Below are some suggestions:

1. Lead the efforts to create a Gay Straight Alliance on campus. The GSA will give LGBTQ students an opportunity to network with other students who also identify as LGBTQ.

2. Assess student housing policies, procedures, and practices to ensure housing guidelines are conducive to the environment and fully support the LGBTQ students.

3. Consider establishing safe spaces within the residence halls including but not limited to a LGBTQ living and learning community. LGTBQ students deserve to reside on campus in safe spaces where they feel comfortable living in their truth.

4. Establish gender neutral (unisex) restrooms on campus.

Conclusion

This study used the theory of care as a framework to examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach, the researcher discovered seven themes and ancillary findings. These themes were (1) perception of campus climate, (2) campus safety, (3) religion and the HBCU, (4) homophobia and the HBCU, (5) perception of faculty and staff culture, (6) LGBTQ student resources, and (7) LGBTQ awareness.

Findings illustrate the need for HBCU campuses to rejuvenate and re-establish a new climate where all students feel welcome. Campus safety should remain a priority,
and more importantly, students should know campus safety is a priority. The findings reveal the need for campus officials to building community within the campus community and focus on developing a rapport with all students they serve and protect. HBCUs must provide adequate resources to support LGBTQ students, it is no longer optional. In essence, HBCUs must give their LGBTQ students the necessary tools to remain academically successful. This may require taking a holistic approach.

There are thousands of colleges and universities around the world where LGBTQ students could study. However, they want to attend institutions that value them, and higher education professionals have a duty to care. The research suggests starting with attracting and retaining a diverse faculty and staff. LBGTQ students are demanding to have more representation on their HBCU campuses.

As the research findings reveal, homophobia remains prevalent in the African American community and HBCUs can be the leaders in the quest to combat the hatred that is impeding progress on the college campuses and within the LGBTQ community. The research findings show that raising LGBTQ awareness is one step forward. Religion may be celebrated on the HBCU campus, and in many ways, it should be expected; after all, it is religious principles that many HBCU institutions were founded upon. However, there must be a happy medium, one that is beneficial to all college stakeholders – including LGBTQ students.
APPENDIX A – Questionnaire

Diversity and Inclusion: Examining the Lived Experiences of LGBTQ Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt

Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this research project. The below questions will guide the interview. The questions below are intended to examine the experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt, and for the purposes of this study, the Bible Belt refers to the state of Mississippi. By participating in this interview, and answering the questions below, you are affirming that you are 18 years of age or older and are able to participate in this study without parental or legal guardian consent. Necessary steps are being taken to ensure confidentiality. This interview should take no more than 2 hours to complete. If you are under the age of 18, please state so at this time. Thank you.

1. Tell me a little about your background (i.e., hometown, age, high school attended, high school achievements, religious affiliation, etc.).
2. What led your decision to attend a Historically Black College and Universities (HBCU)?
3. What is your college major and classification (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior)?
4. Tell me about your coming out story (i.e., the first time you discussed your sexuality with another person)? What was the experience like for you?
5. Describe your relationship with your parents? Are they supportive of your LGBTQ lifestyle?
6. If you could change one or two things about your college experience, what would it be and why?
7. What is the campus environment like for a LGBTQ student at your institution?
8. What does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belong on campus?
9. What is the ideal HBCU experience and does your chosen HBCU meet the qualifications?
10. What LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus, and what LGBTQ resources, if any, would you recommend establishing/implementing and why?
11. Thinking back to when you first decided to attend a HBCU, and given your lived experience on campus as a LGBTQ student, did you make the right choice to attend your chosen HBCU? Explain.
12. Describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students at your institution.
13. How successful is your institution in communicating available LGBTQ resources to LGBTQ students?
14. If you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why?
15. How often does the institution offer LGBTQ-related activities, events, or programs on campus?
16. How do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus?
17. What does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?
18. Would you recommend your HBCU to other prospective LGBTQ students? Why or why not?
19. What can your HBCU do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students?
20. Describe your experience living in student housing (i.e., do you have a roommate, is your roommate welcoming and accepting of your LGBTQ lifestyle, is the student housing staff supportive, do you feel comfortable and safe)?
21. Tell me about your experiences/interactions with non-homosexual students on campus?
22. Tell me how the institution ensures that LGBTQ students are equally represented and/or supported on campus?
23. Have you ever witnessed or been victim to homophobic acts on campus? If yes, tell me about the incident(s).
24. How successful are your instructors/professors in preventing homophobia acts within the classroom setting?
25. What steps do your institution take to ensure campus safety for all students.
APPENDIX B – IRB Approval (The University of Southern Mississippi)

IRB-20-218 - Initial: Sacco Committee Letter - Expedited and Full
irb@usm.edu <irb@usm.edu>
Tue 5/5/2020 12:27 PM
Tel: Holly Foster <Holly.Foster@usm.edu>; Steven Jones <Steven.S.Jones@usm.edu>; Sue Rayard <Sue.Rayard@usm.edu>; Michael Howell <Michael.Howeill@usm.edu>; Michaela Delehaye <Michaela.Delehaye@usm.edu>

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION
The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.
- FACE-TO-FACE DATA COLLECTION WILL NOT COMMENCE UNTIL USMS IRB MODIFIES THE DIRECTIVE TO HALT NON-ESSENTIAL (NO DIRECT BENEFIT TO PARTICIPANT) RESEARCH.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-20-218
PROJECT TITLE: Diversity and Inclusion: Examining the Lived Experiences of LGBTQ Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of Education, Educational Research and Admin
RESEARCHER(S): Steven Jones, Holly Foster

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: May 5, 2020

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson
APPENDIX C – IRB Approval (Jackson State University)

Office of Research and Economic Development

DATE: June 19, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Steven J. Jones
1445 Parkside Drive
Vicksburg, MS 39180

FROM: Christopher U. Lane, MPH, IRB Manager

Re: Protocol 0100-20 entitled: “Diversity and inclusion: Examining the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt”

Department: University of Southern Mississippi

The Jackson State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application and has come to the conclusion your responses are satisfaction meet the requirements for protection of human participants as stipulated by the Federal government. Your application received an Expedited approval. This approval is good for one year from the date of this letter.

Any adverse reactions or problems resulting from this investigation must be reported immediately to the university Institutional Review Board. If you decide to modify or change your procedures in any way, please notify the IRB office in writing. We will review your request in the context of your complete application. If the changes are approved, you will receive written notification for the approval.

cc: Dr. Holly Foster, Advisor
**APPENDIX D – IRB Approval (MS Community College Board)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Steven J. Jones</th>
<th>Phone:</th>
<th>601.624.7803</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Steven.LJones@usm.edu">Steven.LJones@usm.edu</a></td>
<td>Fax:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>1449 Parkside Drive</td>
<td>City:</td>
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**Research Advisor (RA) Contact Information**

- **Name:** Dr. Holly Foster
- **Phone:** 601.266.4751
- **Email:** Holly.Foster@usm.edu
- **Address:** USM Box 3037
- **City:** Hattiesburg
- **State:** MS
- **Zip:** 39406

**Is the PI a current employee of one of the MCC or one of the MACC Institutions?**
- [ ] Yes
- [x] No

**Sponsoring Institution or Agency:** The University of Southern Mississippi
Title: Diversity and Inclusion: Examining the Lived Experiences of LGBTQ Students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt.

I. Purpose: The purpose of the research is to explore the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the Bible Belt.

II. Research Methodology: The study will be conducted using a qualitative research design, guided by phenomenological methods. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

III. Institutional Burden: The study will not place undue burden on the participating institutions. The data collected will be used to improve campus climate, enhance educational resources, and foster a more inclusive environment for LGBTQ students.

IV. Data Analysis: The data collected will be analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on themes related to the lived experiences of LGBTQ students at HBCUs in the Bible Belt.
Use of Data/Anonymity. Please answer the following questions about how the data will be presented.

- Is the data comparative? □ Yes □ No

  - If yes, will the included institutions be compared against each other or against institutions outside of the MACIC? Will the MACIC be compared against other state systems?
  - Institutions within MACIC will be compared against each other.
  - Institutions will be compared with institutions outside of the MACIC.
  - The MACIC will be compared against other state systems.

- The data will be used comparatively in a different manner.
  - Describe entities to be compared:

- The data will not be used as comparative data.

- Will the institutions involved in the research be anonymous in the published result? □ Anonymous □ Not Anonymous

Please provide a summary of data security measures to be employed in connection with this research:

Necessary steps will be taken to ensure the student participants’ confidentiality. Transcripts will be kept secured in a fireproof file cabinet, and electronic data will be password protected. Information saved on storage devices will be deleted at the conclusion of the project to further protect the participants’ identity. Hardcopies of personal identifying information will be shred at the conclusion of the project.

Note: Section III below applies to survey, interview, and other research methods that include direct or indirect contact with human subjects. Researchers using data limited to databases may skip Section III and move on to Section IV.

III. Participants. Provide a brief, non-technical description of the human subjects of the study. This summary should readily identify the following:

(a) Participants. Specify number of participants and their gender, ethnicity, race, and age. Clearly state any inclusion/exclusion criteria as well as identify any select populations such as minors, pregnant women, non-English speaking, remedial, elderly, specific major, etc. If any vulnerable populations are included (i.e., minors, adults with cognitive impairment, non-English speaking persons, etc.) identify additional precautions for their protection.

The study aims to recruit 2-3 LGBTQ students from each of the five selected HBCUs located in Mississippi – two of which are community colleges – Hinds Community College-Utica Campus and Coahoma Community College. Students must be 18 years of age or older and identify as LGBTQ.

(b) Anonymity. What safeguards will be in place for the identity of participants to be anonymous and secure?

Necessary steps will be taken to ensure the student participants’ confidentiality. Transcripts will be kept secured in a fireproof file cabinet, and electronic data will be password protected. Information saved on storage devices will be deleted at the conclusion of the project to further protect the participants’ identity. Hardcopies of personal identifying information will be shredded at the conclusion of the project.

(c) Recruitment. Describe how potential subjects will be made aware of the study and outline any recruitment procedures (email, letters, class announcements, newspaper ads, etc.), including any compensation or incentives.

The Vice President of Student Affairs/Student Services will be contacted at each of the five HBCUs to assist me in connecting with various campus resources and services (i.e., Counseling Services, Gay Straight Alliance, LGBTQ Campus Resource Center, etc.) wherein LGBTQ students may be identified. I believe higher education professionals working in various student affairs/student services capacities may deem valuable in identifying LGBTQ students who are willing to participate in the study. A letter outlining the criteria for participation as well as to provide additional information regarding the study will be sent to the Vice Presidents. Additionally, a letter of invitation will be sent to the Vice Presidents for consideration and dissemination to their student bodies. The letter of invitation will invite students...
who meet the criteria to participate in the study. The letters will be disseminated via college-issued email addresses to students.

(d) Informed Consent. Identify the process of gaining participant consent. Attach a copy of any consent forms used in the study. Provide any necessary explanation if informed consent is waived or not applicable.

An informed consent form will be provided to students in advance of interviews for their review and signature. A copy of the informed consent form is attached hereto.

(e) Risks and Deception. Describe any immediate or long term risks to participants that may arise from participation in this study (physical, emotional, social, occupational, financial, legal, etc.). Indicate if these risks are greater than those faced in normal life, and provide justification for any deception of participants.

Risk for this study are minimal. Though students may become emotional when sharing their personal experiences with homophobia and unequal treatment. As such, I am recommending counseling services to the participants (including but not limited to counseling services provided on their respective campuses).
Signatures

Principal Investigator — I certify that the information in this application is complete and correct. As Principal Investigator, I have the ultimate responsibility for protecting the rights and welfare of human participants, secure conduct of the research, and the ethical performance of the project. I will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of participants in human research.

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

If the proposed research is sponsored by an institutional of higher learning, has the proposed research been approved by the IRB of the sponsoring institution?

[ ] Yes  [ ] No

If "Yes", please obtain the Research Advisor and Department Chair (if applicable) signature below. If "No" the Research Advisor and Department Chair signatures may be left blank.

Research Advisor — I certify that the information in this application is complete and correct, and that this proposed research has been approved by the IRB of the sponsoring institution. As Research Advisor, I confirm that the student researcher under my guidance is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects, and has sufficient training and experience to conduct the research outlined in this application.

I further agree to regularly meet with the student researcher to monitor his or her progress; and if problems arise, I will become personally available to help the student researcher resolve those problems. As an advisor on this project, I will assure the protection of the rights and welfare of human participants, secure conduct of the research, and the ethical performance of the project. I will comply with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of participants in human research.

Signature of Research Advisor

Date

Department Chair — I acknowledge that this research is in keeping with the standards set by our department and our institutional IRB or its equivalent. I also certify that the Principal Investigator has met all the departmental and institutional requirements for approval of this research.

Signature of Department Chair

Date

CIRE subcommittee chair — I acknowledge on behalf of the Council on Institutional Research and Effectiveness (CIRE) that this research has been reviewed and has subsequently received the following recommendation by consensus of the membership.
Approved with Stipulations:

< 2 colleges (1 college, 1 branch campus)

[Signature]

Date: 5/21/2020
APPENDIX E – IRB Permission Letter (Coahoma Community College)

Coahoma Community College
3240 Friars Point Road, Clarksdale, Mississippi 38614
662-621-4401

June 17, 2020

Mr. Steven J. Jones
1419 Parkside Drive
Vicksburg, MS 39180

Re: Letter of Approval for Research

Dear Mr. Jones:

Congratulations! The Institutional Research Board (IRB) at Coahoma Community College has approved your request to conduct research at CCC for your Doctoral Dissertation.

The participants will participate in your approved study. A copy of the research results shall be forwarded to Mrs. Margaret Dixon, Director of Research Assessment, Strategic Initiatives and SACSCOC Accreditation Liaison.

Thanks and please contact Mrs. Margaret Dixon at 662-621-4670 or email: mdixon@coahomacc.edu to administer your survey or interview and for further assistance.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

[Name]
President

Cc: File

www.coahomacc.edu

114
Student A – Interview Transcript
Interview Date: Friday, July 10, 2020 at 11:00 A.M.

Steven Jones
Hello, sir.

Student A
Hey, how are you?

Steven Jones
I'm good. How about you?

Student A
I'm doing great.

Steven Jones
That's good. Thanks again for being willing to participate in my study. I greatly appreciate that. I don't want to take up much of your time. As I said before, the interview will take about two hours.

I want to be able to go ahead and jump right in so we can start it.

So, we'll start off with asking you to tell us a little bit about yourself as much as you want to share. I know we talked about your major and you're attending Coahoma. So, if you want to reiterate those things, that's fine.

Student A
Okay, so I'm from originally from XXXXX, Mississippi, but now I live like in the country part um, attended a local school - Coahoma County Junior/Senior High School and afterwards my intentions weren't to go to Coahoma Community College. I was supposed to have been going to Delta State, but...

I'm so sorry. I'm currently shopping for some furniture for like my new apartment so I apologize.

Steven Jones
So, let's resume. You were telling me that you attended a local high school there and you now attend Coahoma Community College that was not your first choice because you were going to attend Delta State.
Student A
Yes, what happened was my sister got into a car accident which left her paralyzed, so I had no choice but to go to Coahoma.

And while at Coahoma, I have changed my major, probably around like four times.

And last like, this year, I was selected to be XXXXXX, but I didn't get a chance to participant because due to COVID we didn't have the XXXXXX this year. Now I'm, of course, graduating in December, and hopefully I'll be attending Alcorn in January.

Steven Jones
Nice.

So, what led to your decision to attend an HBCU? So, you're currently at Coahoma and we know how you got there. So, what led to your decision to now want to attend Alcorn?

Student A
Well, while at Coahoma...cause in high school, I wasn't really big on HBCUs but at Coahoma it was kind of like being surrounded by people with the same skin color as me, even though ... and like with the same attitude as me, it made me feel more welcomed, you know, to attend HBCUs when I go to school, when I go to Alcorn, to do my graduate and so on. So, it was just like being around people like me. Not as though being at a PWI or a diverse school. It's like, it went to me it would have been like, I wouldn't have had the help or the resources to fulfill my needs. So, it was just being around people who actually look like me.

Steven Jones
So now that you are at Coahoma, and you've been there for a few semesters, do you think you made a good decision in selecting Coahoma Community College as your educational choice at this point?

Student A
As um, well, education wise, it was like the best decision of my life. Yes. I love our academic programs and resources too.

Steven Jones
Okay, so tell us what is your college major and your classification. When are you expected to graduate?

Student A
I'm expected to graduate in December of this year, and my major, currently, is History.

Steven Jones
Okay.
Student A
Some reason because I want to, well, when I go to Alcorn it's going to be History again and I plan on enrolling in law school. And so, I was hoping my history degree can like benefit me.

Steven Jones
That is good. That is good.

So, tell me about your coming out story. What was the experience like for you?

Student A
Well, honestly, I don't really have a coming out story. Like, I didn't tell my family. It was just like one day my partner now, XXXXX, one day, I just popped up at the house with him and it's like they just took a hint. I didn't tell them that "y'all this is my boyfriend." I just brought him to the house. I said, "y'all this is XXXXX" They were like, "okay." And when they heard him talk, they were like oh, okay.

As far as me coming out, to like the people in my area about it, um. Here he comes actually.

Steven Jones
Okay.

Student A
Um, as far as coming out to like the community, I didn't really just make a big post. We just made a Facebook post.

We just made a Facebook post. I think it was Christmas.

Steven Jones
Okay, so how was the Facebook post received by your family?

Student A
Oh, well since my mama already knew, she was like okay. Well, I was getting calls from like, my uncle out of town telling me you know, fuck what everybody says when they find out you are gay. I am still going to love you. And my grandma. She kind of took it in a bad way. She was like, "I heard you were on Facebook on a picture with a boy." And I was like, "yes ma'am." She was like, "next time it needs to be with a girl." She's like, seventy-three, so I didn't take it personal. I just looked over her. But it was like, some of my close friends they were shocked. But like some people, like already knew, like my teammates, because I played football in high school. It was like they already knew so they weren't shocked. Like they were just like cracking jokes.

Steven Jones
So, so I guess you can safely say that you were supported in your decision to come out.
Student A
I actually was.

Steven Jones
So, in terms of your upbringing, religious affiliation, are you Baptist, Methodist, Catholic?

Student A
Well, I attend the Church of God in Christ. I'm Pentecostal. So, my family believe in laying hands on you and speaking in tongues and all of that. So, growing up it was kind of odd because I was wondering why are these people yelling at me in this language that I didn’t know and why are they touching on me.

Steven Jones
So how did your church family receive your coming out post?

Student A
Yeah, I didn't talk to them about it.

Steven Jones
Okay.

Student A
And they didn't talk to me about it.

Um., I haven't even been to the church since then.

Steven Jones
Okay. Understood.

Do you feel that part of your reason for not returning is because of your lifestyle? Do you feel like they would be open and receptive? I mean, what what's your perspective on that?

Student A
In my experiences, the elderly in the church are very judgmental. In my area, especially…

[connection was lost]

So, I've been looking for a church now, um you know, who could possibly accept me. Like, a big church.

Steven Jones
So, we were just talking about the church and how well they would be receptive of the lifestyle.
Student A
Yeah. Um, if I actually told them out of my own mouth. Honestly, they would put me in a circle and start praying and speaking in tongues and laying hands on me.

Steven Jones
So, describe your relationship with your parents. Are they supportive, I know you said your mom was supportive of your lifestyle? What about your dad?

Student A
Um, I really don't talk to my dad about it.

Steven Jones
Okay. Do you and your dad have a relationship at all? Or is this just not something you're comfortable talking to him about?

Student A
Yeah, I'm comfortable talking to him about it, but um, we just really don't like talk about that.

Steven Jones
Understood. If you could change one or two things about your college experience at Coahoma, what would it be and why?

Student A
Um, first, I would have never changed my major four times. Because that kind of threw me back a little bit.

And secondly, um, I probably would have, you know, did my work like I was supposed to and not played around. So, on and so forth.

Steven Jones
Okay, so what does Coahoma do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging on campus?

Student A
Nothing.

Steven Jones
So, what is the ideal HBCU experience and does Coahoma meet that qualification?

Student A
My ideal HBCU experience is like basically just being people like me without being judged. You know. Like, I want to pledge so, pledging and just having a good time. And feeling like I got some sense of support within the community.
Steven Jones
So, tell me a little bit more about that. Expand on that for me. When you say, "being around people that don't judge." Do you feel like you're being judged at Coahoma? Give me some examples.

Student A
Well, it's like some of the teachers at Coahoma. They are kind of religious. So, they won't really just be straight-forth with it but like if they see somebody who is, you know, gay and you know, not really, and they act kind of feminine. They will give them a look. And you will like get the ideal of what they are thinking.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, you said that you wish you were more supported, so what do you mean by that?

Student A
Um, more supported as I was making reference to like, my advisors and academic counselors, because they won't really, like at Coahoma, in certain departments, they won't really tell you what you need. They will like put you in classes they want you to get in. And it's kind of like with them, it's the department before you. You're forced in classes.

Steven Jones
So what LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus and what resources, if any, would you recommend them establishing or implementing?

Student A
Um, CCC don't have no, um, resources for the LGBT community, or like anything to kind of help them or make them feel comfortable.

Um, personally, I wouldn't like suggest that they make a specific group just for the LGBTQ community, but I would suggest that they hold more, well, have more, you know, seminars or discussions with the LGBTQ community at Coahoma. Because it's like, then the President, he's religious also because he's like a pastor. And, you know, so with him, it's like he's not going to have nothing like that. But it's a topic that needs to be discussed and is not being discussed.

Steven Jones
So, to expand on it a little bit, let's talk about LGBTQ resources. So, when I when I say that, I’m talking about safe spaces on campus. I'm talking about LGBTQ Learning Resource Centers on campus. I'm talking about campuses that host Gay Pride events. None of that happens?
**Student A**
Nothing. None of that. Being gay is not a topic at CCC. They will discuss everything else, from police brutality to racism, so like, they will discuss all major topics except for LGBTQ.

**Steven Jones**
So why do you feel, why do you feel that that is not a topic of discussion when considering that LGBTQ, the topic itself, is being discussed so much throughout the nation? So many changes have occurred in the last decade, why do you feel that Coahoma has not embraced this opportunity to provide a more diverse and inclusive environment for its LGBTQ students?

**Student A**
Well, simple. It's all about their personal beliefs. They don't want to, you know, go against their religion or have people at their church look at what they're doing at the school, and you know, kind of look at them differently.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so thinking back to when you first decided to attend Coahoma, and given your lived experience on campus as a LGBTQ student, did you make the right choice to attend Coahoma Community College?

**Student A**
For my academics, yes.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, for everything else?

**Student A**
No. I should have went on...

**Steven Jones**
Expand on that for me. I mean academically you said yes. You know, teachers really support me teachers really helped me along the way. But for everything else, no. So, let's talk about from the LGBTQ perspective. Did you make the right choice?

**Student A**
Um, no. Because like, even though the LGBTQ topic isn't discussed, um, in which, but all this like the LGBTQ community Coahoma is drama all by itself. So, I made the wrong decision with going to Coahoma, and deciding that I wanted to be gay. But, um, I should have went off. I should have like stayed to myself regarding that.

But as far as academics, like I said, No. Oh, well, yeah. Yeah. Coahoma actually is good with academics.
Steven Jones
So, do you feel like maybe you got in with the wrong crowd of people in the LGBTQ community? I know you're talking about the fact that there was drama amongst the LGBTQ community. Tell me about that? Was that because of the resources that were not being provided or being provided, or was it more so just personal attacks, or what was that drama consisting of?

Student A
It was mainly consisting of, just, you know, personal attacks because of personal things that happened.

Steven Jones
So, describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students at Coahoma?

Student A
Um, I'm not going to lie. You have like a few, a handful of faculty and staff who, you know, will sit and talk to you about it and be open-minded to the discussion, but also, you have a majority of faculty and staff who are not supportive.

Steven Jones
Have any faculty or staff who is not supportive of it voiced their concerns or have stated that they're just not supportive of it?

Student A
They won't just flat out say "I don't support it." They will just say, "I'm religious."

Steven Jones
So how successful is your institution in communicating available resources, LGBTQ resources to the LGBTQ student population?

Student A
Repeat that question again.

Steven Jones
So how successful is Coahoma Community College in communicating available resources, LGBTQ resources to LGBTQ students on campuses? So, for instance, if you're a new student on campus, are there any type of posters, flyers, emails, or anything of that nature that is sent out to students, disseminated to students to say, hey, we have an organization here that will support. We have our organization here that you may identify with.

Student A
None existent. It's an epic failure.
Steven Jones
So, if you could use one word to describe your college experience at Coahoma, what would it be and why?

Student A
It's not really a word, it would be like an expression, eh [shook hand back and forth].

Because you know, you got academics that's good, but as far as like LGBTQ. Bad.

Steven Jones
Okay, so how often does your institution offer any type of LGBTQ-related activities, events, programs on campus?

Student A
None.

Steven Jones
Okay. How do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus? How would that change your perspective?

Student A
Well, I don't think, it wouldn't change my perspective because you can have LGBTQ faculty and staff, but they still, but you know, the environment would still be, you know, kind of rough, because you can have one person in the building while twelve other people, you know, is just not supportable of it. So, you don't have to have LGBTQ faculty and staff, you just gotta have faculty and staff who are willing, to like, discuss the topic and be open-minded to it.

Steven Jones
What does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

Student A
Well, even though it is a HBCU campus but to me, you know, like you have white people, like people of different races not just, like majority black, but still have different races, you know. A campus that is not like judgmental or heavy on religion and also, you know, just have a great communication system and a lot of resources.

Steven Jones
So, in reference to being more inclusive, and the fact that we're talking about LGBTQ students, what does that look like?

Student A
Being more inclusive, okay, so with that, kind of like actually having like specific groups, not specific groups but having groups that are for the LGBTQ community and like, the LGBTQ community not being as messy or messed up like Coahoma.
Steven Jones
Okay.

So, what would you recommend your HBCU do? Well actually, let me rephrase that question. Would you recommend your HBCU to other prospective LGBTQ students? So, if I was a gay student, and I was looking for a College to attend, would you or would you not recommend Coahoma Community College?

Student A
I would not.

Steven Jones
And why not?

Student A
Because, like I said the community is just messed up. And plus, you know, you're not really gonna feel like welcomed.

Steven Jones
So, do you feel a sense of belonging at Coahoma Community College as a gay student?

Student A
No.

Steven Jones
What could they do to make you feel more welcome there?

Student A
Welcomed? With my experience, I don't nothing can make me feel comfortable at CCC, you know, being that I am gay because of the stuff I experienced. But CCC should, you know, invest more time actually discussing the topic with their instructors, and like, advise them to not to force your religion on someone else and make religious remarks when someone is telling them that they are gay.

Steven Jones
Okay. So, talk to me about it for a minute. You know, I'm a good, I'm a good reader, I sense from your body language that that bothers you. And so, I sense that when you talk about that specific topic, of religion, and how it relates to your college experience, you have a different facial expression, you have a different demeanor. So, without, and you can share as much as you like, in terms of how far you want to go with this, but tell me what part of that experience that have you so uncomfortable with the whole outcome of your experience at Coahoma?
Student A
Because, like since being raised up, like my momma would do this like since I was little. She would always bring up the Bible and say God made a man for a woman and a woman for a man. So that's something I've dealt with since, as long as I can remember. So, when you go to college, you do go for education, obviously, but you also go to like, get free, and like experience an environment that you've never experienced before. So, when I got there and basically experienced what I went through since growing up, it was like, wow, this is what I have been waiting on my whole life.

Because, it's like, to me, it's like, when you do that, you're basically telling them that "we don't accept you." And um, everybody wants to feel accepted. But, you know, when you bring up religious topics and everybody in the gay community know about the Bible, because I'm pretty sure they have been preached to about the Bible, it's kind of, you know, a reject feeling. You feel rejected.

Steven Jones
Understood.

So, what can your HBCU do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students? Before you answer this question, I want you to think in your mind that you're sitting in a conference room at Coahoma Community College, and it's left up to you to be the voice for every LGBTQ student on campus, and you're sitting at this conference room table across from the president at Coahoma Community College, as well as the Vice President for Student Services at Coahoma Community College, and it's left up to you to be the voice, what would you tell those individuals about how they can enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students?

Student A
What do I want to say, basically?

Steven Jones
Say it man, say it bro. Tell us.

Student A
The most blunt thing I'll say is change your faculty and staff. And basically, when I say that, they will kind of get the gist of what I'm saying. Like it starts with the top. Once you make the change at the top, the bottom usually aligns with the top. So, if the President would just have an open mind and look at it, and actually, like make change within himself and be more open to it, then it can go to like the Dean of Academic Services and she can be open-minded to, and then they can go to the chair of the departments and they can be open-minded to it, and then they can go to the instructors and they can be open-minded to it, and then the instructors can go the students who are not open-minded to it and not willing to discuss it. So, if that would just happen, I think CCC would be one of the best community colleges in Mississippi, the top community college in Mississippi.
Steven Jones
So, being open-minded to the idea of embracing LGBTQ students and, you know, speaking on that, other than that, what else would you tell them?

Student A
Basically, tell them that they don't have to do all like all that extra stuff, like multiple big seminars and all that to make us feel welcome, but at least just talk to us and don't make us feel like we're unwelcome or we're being rejected based off our choices and based on their religion.

Steven Jones
Alright.

So, do you live on campus?

Student A
Nope. Being as though I live in XXXXXX, I stay like XXXXXX XXXXXX from the school so I don't.

Steven Jones
Okay, so you've never lived on campus?

Student A
Other than staying the night, no.

Steven Jones
So, tell me about your experience and interactions with heterosexual students on campus. Do you have a good rapport with your peers, those who do not identify as LGBTQ?

Student A
Well, I'm kind of like an introvert. Like, I stay to myself, but for those who do know that I'm gay, it's like my experience with them was bad. But like, well when I'm just out, and like participating in activities which is rarely, you kind of get the sense, like the football team, you kind of get the sense that they don't feel comfortable around gay dudes. And like, you probably will get, like, a slur towards the gay dudes every now and then, like, faggot but as far as that, I don't really have the experience or been around them, to tell you about those who don't identify themselves as gay.

Steven Jones
Gotcha.

So, tell me how the institution ensures that you're equally represented and supported as a gay student on campus.
Student A
None whatsoever.

Steven Jones
Have you ever witnessed or been a victim to homophobia acts homophobic acts?

Student A
Like I said, I stay to myself. I stay in the art department most of my time. So, I really don't have the experience to just sit here and tell you about a time or a moment that someone, you know, was discriminated against or was a victim of homophobic acts.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So how successful are your instructors in preventing homophobic acts within the classroom setting?

Student A
Well, can you repeat that question again?

Steven Jones
So how successful are your instructors in preventing homophobic acts within the classroom setting? So, basically, I'm asking are your instructors able to manage their classrooms in such a way that all students, including LGBTQ students, feel included, welcomed, and respected in the classroom setting.

Student A
Well, I would say that you have certain teachers, like probably White teachers, that kind of do their best, but as far as like, I'll give the whole campus, matter of fact, I would just give them an F. Because it's not something that they put time into. Nope, nothing.

Steven Jones
Okay, so what steps do your institution take to ensure campus safety for all students?

Student A
Oh, nothing.

Steven Jones
As a student at Coahoma Community College, do you feel safe?

Student A
Uh, no, I don't.

Steven Jones
Can you elaborate on that? Why do you feel unsafe on campus?
Student A
Well, because we've, I'm pretty sure you heard we had fights, we had two shootings on campus this year. We've had fights and a rape, so like, huh I just don't really feel safe or protected.

Steven Jones
So, let me ask this question in a different way. As an LGBTQ student, do you feel comfortable on campus?

Student A
No.

Steven Jones
Explain why.

Student A
Well, because of rape.

Steven Jones
Was it a female or male that was rape? Was it same-sex related? Was it opposite-sex related?

Student A
Same-sex related.

Steven Jones
Okay.

And was it females or males?

Student A
Males. It was between two males on the football team.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, two males on the football team raped another guy or the two guys raped each other. What happened?

Student A
Um, one guy tried to rape another guy.

Steven Jones
Okay.
Student A
Not tried. He did rape him.

Steven Jones
Okay.

And as a result, what actions did the college take to resolve that? What actions did the college take to ensure other gay students that they would be safe and that this individual would be held responsible?

Student A
They didn't look at it as a gay thing; even though, it was gay. All they did was like just punish the dude, and then after that, they didn't want it to brought up again. I don't think they allowed the teachers to just talk about it or let us have discussions in the classroom about it. It was like they were barred from saying something.

Steven Jones
You mentioned to me earlier on that you had a partner. Did you meet your partner at Coahoma?

Student A
No, I met my baby on Snap Chat.

Steven Jones
Okay, got it. Alright.

Student A
He is about to attend Coahoma.

Steven Jones
Okay, he's going in as a freshman this semester?

Student A
No, he's a sophomore this semester.

Steven Jones
Okay, got it.

So, is there anything else that you would like to add?

Student A
Coahoma needs to do better.
Steven Jones
Coahoma needs to do better. Well, sir, thank you so much for taking the time to participate in my interview.

Once again, thank you so much. If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me. You have my email, my cell, and once again, I thank you so much for your time. Be safe. Stay healthy.

Student A
Yes, sir. Thank you for the opportunity.

Steven Jones
You're welcome. Thank you.
Student B – Interview Transcript
Interview Date: Tuesday, May 12, 2020 at 12:00 P.M.

Steven Jones
Hello, Student B, how are you?

Unmute your mic so I can hear you.

Student B
My bad. Hi.

Steven Jones
Okay, there you go. Alright. How are you? Nice to meet you.

Student B
Nice to meet you. I'm doing good. How are you?

Steven Jones
I'm doing well. So, how's the weather where you are?

Student B
Um, I haven’t been outside much, but it's been like, it's been pretty cool. It's been about 70s, 60s. It's pretty cool.

I imagine it's hotter down there.

Steven Jones
It is. It is. Today, it's about 80 degrees. So, um.

Student B
Oh.

Steven Jones
Yeah. Beautiful day. I live in XXXX, so the weather is pretty hot. For the most part, it's always hot. But we do get a lot rain. I'm in the Central Mississippi area, a little South of the Mississippi Delta.

Well, thank you again for your interest in my study. I greatly appreciate that. I want to, I want to give you the opportunity today to basically be open and honest about your experience at Mississippi Valley State University. An opportunity to talk about the different experiences you've had with faculty, students, and support staff. So, I want to
Student B: Okay.

Student B: Yes, I'm ready.

Steven Jones: Alright. So, thank you for participating in the research project. The questions that you will be receiving today will guide the interview. The questions are intended to examine your experiences as an LGBTQ student at a Historically Black College and University in the Bible Belt, and for the purposes of this study, the Bible Belt is the state of Mississippi as we know there's about seven southeastern states that are considered part of the Bible Belt. But for the purposes of this study, Mississippi is the state of choice. By participating in this interview and answering the questions provided, you're affirming to me that you're 18 years of age or older and do not need parent or legal guardian consent. Do you agree?

Student B: Yes.

Steven Jones: Alright. So, let's get started.

Tell me a little bit about yourself. Your high school achievements, religious affiliation, or anything else you would like to share.

Student B: Okay, well, I'm from XXXXX. It's a small suburb. It's about 30 minutes from Chicago. So, I went to a Midwestern High School. XXXXX. I did very good. I graduated magna cum laude from XXXXX High School. I did track all four years. I maintained high honor roll. I did track. I did women's empowerment. I did Business Professionals of America, foreign language. I was very involved.

Um, I don't subscribe to a particular religion in particular. I just believe in God, and growing up, I went to church with my mother to United Church of Christ Trinity. You wouldn't know it because it's in Chicago. It's like one of those big Chicago churches where it's like, you know, three floors and everything. So, um, I was raised to believe in God; I don't really prescribe to a particular religion in particular.

Steven Jones: Okay.
Student B
Yeah.

Steven Jones
Um, so what led to your decision to attend Valley as your college of choice?

Student B
A full ride. That was it, because I did pretty good. I got a 27 ACT, I had a 3.76 GPA, but all the schools that I would get into, yes, I can get in and they would give me scholarships, but very few offered a full ride. So, I just came to Valley because I don't want to go into debt.

Steven Jones
Gotcha. That makes sense. So, what is your major and what is your classification in terms of freshmen, sophomore, junior, senior?

Student B
Um, I just finished my freshman year. So, technically I'm a sophomore, I'm a chemistry major. I'm working towards my Bachelors of Science degree in chemistry.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, tell me about your coming out story.

Student B
Okay, so yeah, I had, I had two, so the first one, um, my brother, he outed me. He didn't mean any harm by it, but pretty much what happened was, it was the summer before my freshman year. So, I was talking to this girl at his middle school, because we have a middle school and high school, so I was talking to this girl, and so she must was going around the middle school talking about me. So, my brother came home one day, and he was like, I was gay. I was like, kind of worried because people get kicked out. People get kicked out. They're homeless, like so many things happen to people who just come out. And so, um my dad bust open the door to the bathroom. I was washing my hair and stuff. He's taking me to my hair appointment, and we are in the car, and I'm sitting behind him and he's like, "Are you gay or bi?" And I was like, um, "I'm a little bit a little bit." And he was like, "Oh, just don't like to... you shouldn't just tell everybody that." And so that was cool. Like after that, he was cool with it. And he defended me because I told him, how like, a girl sent me Bible verses because she knew I was bi. My dad was like, "Yeah, like that's wrong. Like just don't talk to her." And he'll still defend me and stuff. So that was my dad. Everything went well with that, but my mom, um, she's no longer in my life anymore. But before, like, I cut her off. Pretty much I came up to her. I was like, "Mom, I'm bi and she was like, she’s like, give me a hug. I said "Mom, wait. I'm bi." She's was like, "Oh, no. Just come give me a hug." Like, she didn't really want to believe me, because like, you know, I'm more feminine, like, you know, I'm not, I'm not a tomboy
slash stud or whatever. So, she didn't really believe me, but she didn't like, curse me out or kick me out or like disown me or anything like that. So, they both know.

Steven Jones
That's, that's interesting, because my next question was going to be to describe your relationship with your parents. Are they supportive of your gay lifestyle?

Student B
Yeah, I say my dad is supportive. He makes jokes about it. Like he, both of my parents make jokes about it. I remember one time I was in the car, my mom and my brother was talking about, like his, he had a girlfriend or whatever, and I was like, "You don't have a girlfriend?" And my mom was like, "Well, you don't have one neither. So, who are you to talk?" Like she jokes about it and stuff. Um, she's no longer in my life though, but like she never, like, she never spewed hate towards me because of it. It also helps that like, I'm still young. Like, I haven't brought anybody home. So, I think it's also like, that kind of eases up a little bit. Oh, my dad, he's for sure supportive. Like he's for sure. I don't have to worry about him like, like disowning me. He is for sure supportive. Like we're good on that.

Steven Jones
Okay. So, when you say your mom is no longer in your life, is it because of your lifestyle? Or is it just other choices?

Student B
No, she's bonkers. So.

Steven Jones
I understand?

Student B
Yeah.

Steven Jones
Okay. So, if you could change one or two things about your college experience, what would it be and why?

Student B
Um, like, pertaining to what I could do or the college can do?

Steven Jones
In reference to your own choices. So, if you could change one or two things about your college experience about you know, if, if there's something that you thought Valley should change, or if it's something that you thought you should change, what would those things be?
Student B
Um, I wish I would have fell into the right crowd earlier because my first two months I fell in with the wrong people and so when things like went left, it was just the whole situation. So, I wish I would have like, the friends I have now are great. They're amazing, supportive, like everything. So, I wish I would have just knew sooner, like I wish I would have known who was best for me sooner. That's what I would change.

Steven Jones
Okay. And from the college perspective, is there anything that you would have changed from the college experience? From Valley's perspective? Is there anything that you think they should have change?

Student B
Um, does it have to LGBT because it's really like on the other side?

Steven Jones
No.

Student B
Okay. Um, one thing, I wish it was more like, hands-on and direct, and I wish I didn't have to go through so many steps to get certain things done. Like for example, like just recently, I had a charge on my account because I have a full ride. And so, I emailed financial aid back and forth, like "Why is my balance $104?" I had to email them back and forth and they said contact student accounts. I went to student accounts. And then I had to message the director of something, I forgot. I feel like some of the faculty is known, like okay, at Valley XXXXX is known for being a problematic teacher. XXXXX is known for being a problematic teacher. And when I went to his higher up, in the Natural Science Department, they just made excuses for him. Like we had proof that on the midterm exam, he put things that were not taught to us in class or in the required textbook. And I told the lady I said, "If it's not in the required textbook, and if it's not taught in the lecture, it shouldn't be on a test." And she was like "I disagree." Like she just, uh. I wish they were more selective or I guess paid attention more to who they're putting in these positions. So, yeah.

Steven Jones
So, what is your campus environment like for an LGBTQ student at your institution?

Student B
Um, for females and males is different. I think as a female, I get, if anything, I get praise. I get more accepted, but I feel like, for a male, it's very dangerous and it's very like sad. Because where I'm from in the Midwest, you know there's still homophobia out here, but it's not as bad as in the South. So, for example, my first week, it was Freshman Orientation Week. They were doing like a talent show for like the freshmen and stuff. And so, a guy named XXXXX, he's more feminine. And so, he just got up and he just danced. He just danced, you know, he was prancing or whatever. And like 10 guys, they
just got up and walked out. And that shook me, I wasn't even expecting that because, where I'm from, we have assemblies where guys do death drops, splits, like, and people just, know it's normal. And so, for them to get up and walk out, I was just disgusted. I was so disgusted. Meanwhile, heterosexual boys got up there and rapped, who couldn't even rap, and they sat through that. And then it was another instance where me and my friend were hanging out with her friends from another college that's in the south. So um, and I forgot what other school it was, but they're from another school and stuff. So, we were sitting in the car with the with the three guys and she was like, in the, in the passenger seat. I was in the back. And so, the guy all of a sudden, he's like, oh, he talked about how guys be gay and stuff like that. And I was like, "Well, hold on because I'm bisexual." And he was like, "Oh, it's okay that you're bisexual." He literally told me it's okay that you're bisexual because you're a girl, and you're not a guy. And I said, "It's either gay or straight." And I said, "Well, that doesn't make sense because bi means both, so like, what and so at that point, um, I was ready to go. I was like, are you ready to go? Are you ready to go because, and then after that one of them tried to get with me and I'm like, I don't date homophobic guys. That's why it's hard for me to find like somebody I'm interested in because I don't tolerate homophobia or any type of hate. So, um, yes, I say as a girl, like it's easy, like or at a party, for example, like, okay, the dude was dancing. They walked out, but at a party it was two girls making out. Like, of course, people want to see that so like, for two girls to be gay it's more acceptable, but if it was a dude, then it's like, oh, like, even if he is bi, oh he's gay. I'm not with that gay shit. Like, all that other stuff. So, I think as a girl for me, it's been quite easy. But for a boy, it's another story.

Steven Jones
So, what does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging on campus?

Student B
Um, well, for example, they had a speed dating thing that was on campus like a month before we left. Um, and it was like, at first, I didn't go. At first, I wasn't going to go because I thought it was probably like just for the straight people. And I went, and actually, it was for like lesbians, bisexuals, like it wasn't just for straight people. So, like, that was a good way to make people feel welcome. Um, I don't think they've ever spewed any like homophobia though. Like any hate towards LGBT people. Um, yeah, like it's like, I never like heard any homophobia going on on campus and no one has ever said anything homophobic towards me. So, I think that's just, that's all I can ask for really.

Steven Jones
Okay, so what is the ideal HBCU experience and does your chosen HBCU meet the qualifications?

Student B
Um, ideal, I would say just resources wise. I feel like that makes it. The reason why like I was undecided was because I wanted to make sure wherever I went, I had a lot of
resources as far as like study abroad, internships, and any type of support that I would need. I think Valley do good at like the basics, but like as far as like studying abroad and like I don't know. And just having more activities. The only thing that get pushed is like the sororities and fraternities. I wish they had more like more things more thing to offer than athletics or fraternities and sororities. I wish, I just wish they had more as far as like that, too, because I could use like to help me, but I mean I just use outside sources now. Like I just applied for internships like outside of Valley but yeah, I wish they had more resources at a HBCU.

**Steven Jones**
And when you say "the basics," what do you mean by "the basics?"

**Student B**
Like, the classes are good. Like, I mean, I do good in classes. They'll teach you, like they will go over what I need to know like for my major and stuff, like I was like, class wise, it's okay.

**Steven Jones**
So, what LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus and what LGBTQ resources, if any, would you recommend establishing or implementing and why?

**Student B**
I've honestly, I've not heard of any LGBTQ resources. I've not heard of any. Um, I haven't used any. I don't have too much information on that area. They don't. Yeah, I don't have any and I haven't used any either if there are any.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. So, do they have safe spaces on campus for LGBTQ students?

**Student B**
Um, well, yeah, like if you walk past some people's doors, some people have the, um, like the rainbow, like the rainbow flag or the rainbow stickers. Some people's doors, they actually have that on there. I like, I'll see a poster too that says like safe space. So yeah. they have a couple of those.

**Steven Jones**
What about a Gay Straight Alliance?

**Student B**
Um, I don't think there's one because I literally, when I was filling out my, um, like my housing and stuff, a list of clubs popped up and it said Gay Straight Alliance but like, they've never announced, I've never heard it announced, got an email or anything about the Gay Straight Alliance. So, I don't really think there is one, or they don't push it enough.
Steven Jones
Okay. Thinking back to when you first decided to attend an HBCU, and given your lived experiences on campus as a gay student, did you make the right choice to attend Valley?

Student B
Yes, I think I did. Because nothing like bad has happened to me because of my sexuality. Yeah, I think I made the right choice.

Steven Jones
Okay. Describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students at your institution.

Student B
I would say, Because I think I haven't experienced homophobia from them, but like a lot of them are older, so I don't even think I would, I wouldn't go to them like for any type issues that I would have. I feel like because they're older and I wouldn't like expect them to be so accepting, so I'm not too sure about that because they haven't really said anything homophobic. Um, but I haven't, like ever reached out to them pretending to like my sexuality or anything.

Steven Jones
How successful is your institution in communicating available LGBTQ resources to LGBTQ students? I know you were just talking about the fact that they announced that they have a GSA but they really don't promote the GSA. So, talk to me a little bit more about that.

Student B
Yes, um, I've never, like, I don't know that they push it. I know for sure the LGBTQ students makeup like a good portion of the student body. So, I think they should push it more because I've never had an email or like, I never seen a poster, they put posters up for everything. Every sorority and fraternity has a poster up for like everything, they're doing a recruiting meeting or something, they put a poster up for everything, but I've never heard of it. So, I don't.

Steven Jones
Gotcha, that makes sense. So, um, you just mentioned that you have a large population of LGBTQ students on campus.

Student B
Okay, I would say it's a common thing for people to be gay, like, I know a couple. Because there's people that I know because I know personally or like, I can just tell, but like, I'm only talking about people that I know tell my people, obviously, there are also people who are maybe down low or like I wouldn't know. But like, I know like a few gay people and like people that I know are gay. It's a common thing on our campus.
Steven Jones
And when you say the word "down low", can you explain to me what does that mean?

Student B
It's when they are privately gay, but they're not out to the world that they're gay.

Steven Jones
Okay, so if you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why? One word.

Student B
One word, I would just say "useful" because I feel like things have happened like personally and academically that have helped me to grow as a person. I feel like the first two months, even though it was a personal situation, I fell out with the wrong crowd. That kind of taught me boundaries and you know, how to pay attention to red flags; and academically, um, this is the first year I've had a teacher who I could barely understand. I literally had to listen to determine what he was saying, so it taught me how to listen better. It taught me how to handle different types of teachers, like different, like difficult teacher, difficult teachers. Um, so I would just say useful like academically and personally because it just it taught me a lot.

Steven Jones
Okay, so you mentioned that you had a huge falling out on campus with the wrong crowd. Can you talk to me a little bit about that experience?

Student B
Yes. Okay. So, my first week, I had, I had gotten close to these five girls. And throughout the whole, like friendship, I felt like I was talked down on the most. I'm not, I'm not an assertive person, and on top of that, I'm the only one who's from the suburbs, so they automatically associate me being like, soft, and I am soft, but I'm not aggressive. Like, I will beat you up. Like I'm not that type of girl. I like to just be peaceful. So, um, I would just say throughout the whole friendship, it was certain red flags. The first red flag, um, one of them was like how they felt that, um, I need to, like, open up more. I'm too closed off. And it's just like, why are they trying to find a problem with me because I don't do anything. And the second one was when one of the girls, she talked to me, like, one day, I had an issue with her because she just talked down to me, like, one day, we were making drinks or whatever. And she was just like, you have known me for the past three days, but like, just make your own drink. Like she said that to me, or we were in the car, and I said a bad joke that she didn't find funny, and she was like, "Oh, you're just irritating me." She would be so passive aggressive towards me. Um, and then one girl thought that there should be like a straight pride. I'm like a "straight pride." Two or three of them have cheated on people before. One of them even said, "Oh yeah, I manipulate people and they won’t even know it." I wanted to see the good in them. Two months had past, and it was like November, late November and it was before we were about to go for our break, and so I let one of them borrow my detergent. Cause mind you, I didn't have a roommate. I
Steven Jones
Were they gay individuals as well or no?

Student B
One of them said that she likes what she likes when she likes it, but I wouldn't consider her gay. She does gay stuff. But the fact that she said there should be a straight pride and that straight people are oppressed by gay people, um, that's very problematic in and of itself, or one of them. I think none of them like are really as like, like me. I'm very like pro-LGBT, or whatever. I feel like none of them are pro-LGBT like that. Because how can you say, oh yeah, straight people are oppressed by gay people. And they say the F-word like, oh, a lot. It's laughable that I use to hang around them.

Steven Jones
Well, so let's go back to talking about activities here for a second so I can get some clarity. How often does the institution offer LGBTQ-related activities, events or programs on campus?

Student B
Rarely, it was just that one event where it was speeding date, and yeah, that was one of event that I heard of.

Steven Jones
Got it. How do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus?
**Student B**  
I think we should, especially in the south, I haven't heard of any of the faculty being LGBT. But we for sure need that in the south because it's like, the homophobia is real down there.

**Steven Jones**  
So, when you say the homophobia is real, tell me a little bit more about that. Have you witnessed any type of homophobia or heard any homophobia?

**Student B**  
It was just the whole walking out on a dude dancing, or how dudes use the F-word. The F-word is regularly said down there by the dudes down there. Um, and I was like in the car with the dudes who were like, "Oh, yeah, it's okay that you're bi because you are a girl." And yeah, it's just like those few instances it's enough to tell me that it's an issue.

**Steven Jones**  
Okay, and when you say the F-word, what is that word?

**Student B**  
The F-word that rhymes with maggot.

**Steven Jones**  
Okay, got it. Got it.

Okay, so what does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

**Student B**  
I think a campus that has, um, that's diverse racially and ethnically. But the HBCU are, of course, like majority black but it's nothing wrong with like having like a diverse like ethnicity racial, racial groups in there. I think it's good to mix it up sexuality wise, what other way? I mean, yes, those are the only two ways that really stand out to me. Like oh, multiple races and multiple, like sexualities, even religions, I think that's also good to have at HBCUs. A lot of people don't know enough about like Muslim culture. People think Muslims are like, people who think Muslims are still terrorists and all the other stuffs. I think it's like, if we had more representation for like, a lot of groups, I think that will help. Or like Asians, like I was in a health class and this dude was like, Asians they're so like frail and like they're just so frail. You know the stereotype of the Asian is they are weak men. These people have not seen a lot of Asians. He acted like Asians are just like, such a stereotype. If he would have met an Asian in person, or had seen one maybe he would have thought they were just so week, like yeah.

**Steven Jones**  
So, would you recommend your HBCU to other prospective LGBTQ students? Why or why not?
**Student B**
I would recommend it to the girls, but I wouldn't recommend it to the guys. It's just that. I don't want to put, like, I feel like as a guy, I wouldn’t want them to get down there. Nah. I wouldn't even recommend it to a masculine gay guy. I wouldn't recommend it to the gay guys, but I would recommend it to the gay girls though. Because I just feel like it is safer for girls than boys. If a girl hits on a girl, it's just like, oh, I'm good, but if a guy hits on a guy, it's like they can get beat up down there. Yeah, I wouldn't recommend it for the guys.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. What can your HBCU do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students?

**Student B**
I definitely think they should push more LGBT resources because there are people who have family who have disowned them for their sexuality. So, I think if they have more LGBT counseling services, or if they would push the Gay Straight Alliance, um, just those two things, that's all I could really ask for.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. Describe your experience living in student housing. Do you have a roommate? Is your roommate welcoming and accepting of your gay lifestyle? Is the student housing staff supportive? Do you feel comfortable and safe?

**Student B**
Um, my first roommate that I had, I got her after winter break and she is a little fruity, she is a little gay herself. So, it was never any issue with that. And the second roommate I had, once I moved out, because I couldn't live with her anymore, once I moved out, um, she was cool too. She doesn't have any issue with it. So, but um, the housing staff, they're fine. They never say anything homophobic. They would only say, "Don't sneak boys in" during the meetings. They were not worried about the gay girls, I guess.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. So, tell me about your experience or interactions with heterosexual students on campus.

**Student B**
Um, I mean, they're, they're fine. They're cool. They're like, I have a couple of like straight girls I'm cool with and stuff like that. They're not like super hateful.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. Tell me how the institution ensures that LGBTQ students are equally represented and/or supported on campus. So how does Valley ensure that people like you are equally represented and/or supported on campus?
**Student B**
I mean, I guess like when it comes to like voting and stuff like that, they don't say, "Oh, you can only run for a certain like position if you're straight", like they don't really discriminate against who can run and who you can vote for. So, I think that's good. Um.

**Steven Jones**
So, a male could run for homecoming queen?

**Student B**
I honestly don't know that. I think they won't even do it because I feel like girls, like, people aren't that accepting. So, I feel like, that wouldn't even happen down there. Like I feel like people wouldn't vote for a dude from homecoming queen. We're not that, they're not that progressive just yet. Oh, yeah.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. Alright. So, have you ever witnessed or been a victim to homophobic acts on campus? If yes, tell me about the incidents, and I think you kind of mentioned a few of these earlier, in terms of things that you've heard guys say. Expand a little on that.

**Student B**
Um, so like, the very first one was when they all walked out cuz the dude was dancing and then people were like, a dude was like, "No one wants to see that." And it's like, so that doesn't give you the excuse to walk out just because he's dancing. He's not even doing anything, like homosexual. He is just dancing in a feminine way. And they felt that it was necessary to walk out like, and then on top of that, one of the girls that I used to be cool with, that same guy, she got into an argument with, she called him the "F" word. She called him the "F" word that rhymes with maggot, and she's from Georgia. So, I guess that's normal out there. But out here, I would tell my dad like don't say that word around me. Anyway, um, I guess it would be that instance. And then when I was in the car with the guy, he was like, Oh, yeah, it's okay that your bi because you're a girl, but guys can't be bi. They got to be gay or straight. Um, that type of thing. And then it was another dude. They mentioned in same car, the car I was in, they have mentioned a guy named XXXXX. He's like a light skinned male. He's very animated. He's straight, but he's animated. And so, they brought him up. They were like, oh, yeah, I think he's gay. Like I said, how do you know? They said, I don't know, I just guess. How do you know? Have you seen him hook up with a guy? Have you seen him do anything like, like actually gay or he just acts feminine and so you think he's gay? Like, it's just things like that.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so how successful are your instructors and professors in preventing homophobia acts within the classroom setting?
Student B
Um, I want to say they don't really do anything to prevent it because, like, nothing homophobic has happened in the class so I can't really comment on that. Because nothing homophobic happens in the classroom like that that they would know of.

Steven Jones
What steps do your institution take to ensure campus safety for all students?

Student B
Well, the police are out all the time. The police are constantly out all the time, and then at night, that's usually when the RAs will go to their dorm rooms. There's like this big security dude who is there from like 9pm to like, probably like six in the morning or something like that. Like he is a big security dude. So, he's enough to secure the premises because he's a big dude. It'll be two big dudes. Um, like at night, and the police are like around all the time. So.

Steven Jones
Okay. Anything else you would like to add? I mean, you went through these fairly quickly. You were well prepared for the interview.

Student B
Um, anything I would like to add?

Steven Jones
Anything you would like to add about your lived experiences at Valley? Anything about how they can make the college experience better? You know, I have a lot of friends who have attended HBCUs and I actually was a college administrator at an HBCU. One of the things I know from being around people that have had that experience is it's all about the HBCU experience. And if it's the HBCU experience, in a few words, explained to me from an LGBTQ student’s perspective, from your lens, how do you see the HBCU experience?

Student B
Um, I like the culture of it. It's very, very black, you know. At all the parties they have black fraternities and sororities. They stroll or whatever. So, I mean, the parties, they're nice, they're very black. Um, they play hip hop rap music. Um, I will say like the band. It's very like black. I feel like for the culture of everything, I like the culture of it. One thing I wish they would have, like I said, resources along with academic resources like study abroad and internships.

I feel it would raise morale if we had things like a Starbucks or like a Chipotle or like, if they can make some partnerships with some bigger companies so we can have like certain places to eat. People complain about the food a lot. So, if they had more options on what you can eat, that would be great too.
Steven Jones
Okay, so let me throw this last question out at you. Do you see Valley being more progressive in the next five years and why? For example, do you see Valley hosting a gay pride?

Student B
I think enough students would have to get together for that. It would have to be something that comes from the higher ups. It would have to come from the students themselves. Like we would have to, like get together to, like make that happen. But um, I guess I could see it happening if the students put it together. I don't see the older people or higher ups doing something like that.

Steven Jones
Are you in any type of student organizations or extracurricular activities on campus?

Student B
No, I wanted to join the Student Alumni Association though, but that was before break, and we couldn't go back, so, but yeah, I'm not interested in sororities, but I feel it would be easier, but like, I'm not interested in all that. That's what get pushed the most, but I would like to join the Student Alumni Association, or if they had a Gay Straight Alliance that actually got pushed, I would join that, but nah.

Steven Jones
Okay. So that would conclude our interview.

Student B
Okay, thank you.

Steven Jones
Thank you very much. Have a good day.

Student B
Okay, you too.

Steven Jones
Bye, bye.
APPENDIX H – Student C Interview Transcript (MS Valley State University)

Student C – Interview Transcript
Interview Date: Friday, June 5, 2020 at 2:00 P.M.

Steven Jones
Student C, how are you?

Student C
Hi, I'm fine, and you?

Steven Jones
Awesome. Awesome. Well, thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule to complete the interview for my study.

By participating in the interview and answering questions below, you're affirming that you're 18 years of age or older and able to participate in the study without parental consent or guidance. Is that true and accurate?

Student C
Yes, that is true and accurate.

Steven Jones
Okay, so before we get started, any questions for me?

Student C
No, not at all.

Steven Jones
Okay, so let's get started. Tell me a little bit about yourself. Your background hometown, age, high school that you attended, and your religious affiliation because that's going to be very important for this study.

Student C
Okay, well my name is Student C. I prefer to be called Student C though.

I'm originally from XXXXX, Georgia. I grew up in inner city schools. Um, what else? Oh, I do identify as Baptists. Um, what else? Oh, I'm the oldest of three. First generation college student. I think that's pretty much it.

Steven Jones
Oh, you said you identify as Baptist.
Student C
Yes.

Steven Jones
You know, the more Baptist you are, and the more Southern Baptist you are, this topic can be very uncomfortable. So, tell me how this has been a challenge or struggle for you as you've grown up over the years?

Student C
Well, okay. So just based on my experience, thus far, in meeting other people, being as I, you know, I don't appear as someone who would be a part of the LGBTQ community, I haven't really, growing up, I really didn't get the backlash or I wasn't really reprimanded. Thankfully, I had parents who were very open, they encouraged us to, you know, express ourselves how we wanted to, to live our lives as our lives, and not their lives. And my dad, my dad is in the church. He was a deacon, he's a pastor. So it's like, growing up with a father in the church, and then you identify as something that is like taboo, it's like, you know, you get the side eyes, but it's nothing that's for me, because I don't I don't appear, you know, I'm a cisgender woman, it wasn't as bad, but I did have the whispers. You know, and when I brought my friends around that appeared, then it was like, "Oh, she's hanging, you know, with those type of, you know, is she one of them." You know, stuff like that. So, it wasn't really bad for me, but to see my friends and my peers get the worst end of the spectrum. That's what really made me ticked there like, even though you don't do it to me, you're doing it to my friends or people that identifies as. So, um, that was really my experience; and then still to this day, I think my experience just been different. So that's why I don't really talk about it because I don't get the backlash as much until I'm in a different environment. Then it's like, like outside of my black circle, then, you know, it's like, that's when I got it. So, like moving to Mississippi, that was like a wakeup call. Because, you know, at home, I could express myself, you know, I didn't really have the side eyes as much. But when I went to Mississippi, as a freshman, we were just, I mean, I was an English major in undergrad. So, we were discussing a book, and as I said, I don't appear, so when I was, you know, I basically said it, like, yeah, identify as queer. The class just turned and looked to me, and they were like, you're gay? And I'm like, yeah, and my teacher was like, and I'll never forget this, she was like, "Don't bring that city stuff down here." And I was just like, you know, it was a back and forth there. And you know, I had to call my mother because, you know, I wasn't really used to like that up in your face, um, hate, I guess. Discrimination. So that was like a wakeup call going, you know, into a rural area and expressing myself. Then I didn't have, like, back home I had a lot of friends who identified as queer or a part of the LGBTQ community. At school, it was like so hard because it was like I was the only one. So, although I have friends my friends really couldn't really relate to me how I needed them to relate to me. And then the experience is just different. Having people always ask you why you don't have a boyfriend, you know, stuff like that, like the little things for me that was really hard adjusting to, but as I matriculated, I started to see more students come to campus that identified as LGBTQ students, and I realized like this is a growing community on
campus, and yet people are still blind to our needs and to us. Until this day, um. Last year was our first. Let me back up.

So last year, I had the opportunity to go to the human rights campaigns HBCU summit and that was like really life changing for me, and I really realized that my campus was very behind on supporting students like me and giving us the resources. So, I always wanted to start an organization that was like a safe space for us, but being so involved in other things, it kind of like took the back seat. So last year, I started the process, but then, you know, not last year, last semester, the COVID-19 came and it, you know, stopped it there. But even before we, you know, COVID-19 affected us, it was so hard getting administration to listen, like I had to send several emails, emails didn't get responded to; so I had to find time to go in, you know, pop up at their offices. It was just so hard. And I'm like, wow, Jackson State, which is just an hour away from us, they have the resources and, you know, it's not as hard for them to have people listen to them, so why can't I get that on campus? It was just, you know, although I didn't get it there on the harsh end, when you do the legwork for people that do get the backlash, the discrimination, it was just hard seeing, you know, why is it this hard? You know, especially as black students in an all-black community, you know, being somewhere that you feel comfortable, but then being marginalized as well. Can you get what I'm saying?

Steven Jones
Yes.

Student C
So that's been my experience so far.

Steven Jones
So, let me ask this question. You said you went to the human rights campaign summit, and there you were able to realize how far behind Valley was from your counterparts, so what did you hear or see to help you form that opinion? Were there other institutions there that were more open to the idea, had available resources? How did you draw that conclusion?

Student C
Okay, so it was for HBCU students only. So, it was about 33 HBCUs there and about 50 students. Um, and we had dialogues, panels, and just having conversations with these students about the resources they have at their schools. Some campuses like Howard, Spelman, Winston Salem State, um, it was other schools that's really getting away from me right now, but they've had organizations and safe spaces. That, um, you know, supported them and is not recent, it's been for years. And even though they still said they had their issues, like they're seen and there talked about. We're not seen or talked about on my campus. So just talking to them about how, you know, their organizations ran, how they're relationships with their faculty, and stuff like that, I realized like, yeah, we really getting the short end of the stick at Valley. Then Jackson State was there as well. So that's really what made me think like, okay, it's not just a Mississippi thing because it's
Jackson State has these resources, then, you know, maybe we have to just boil it down to the location in Mississippi where I am, you know, we're already you know, the delta is considered one of the poorest places in Mississippi. So maybe it's that, but then I'm like, no, because like the, the mindset of the students on campus, the community, the faculty, you know, not to the to divert from this conversation, but just holding events on campus. I was a part of student government, university ambassadors, I'm in a sorority, so having different perspectives of campus organizations and how they respond, to me as a queer person, was just like different organizations responded to me differently. And to hold events bringing awareness to, you know, a part of me that I identify as was hard in certain organizations.

So, I also once served as the Panhellenic president. So, getting other fraternities and sororities to participate in what I emphasized in my organization, it was hard, like, you know, my organization supported me simply because I was a part of that organization and it was a part of who I am. So, they supported the events that I wanted to bring to campus, but overall, the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement, it was like, no. They're like, you know, I don't think we really have the audience for this. You know, when it came to the funding behind some of the projects, I wanted to do so that was hard. So, when I went to the conference, the summit, just hearing how other students had to struggle to get funded, you know, find the money to hold certain events. It was like, okay, it can be done. So, a lot of that stuff I took back to school, I still stay in contact. Even though I'm graduating, I have found a community of LGBTQ+ students who agreed to still take on the work. So that was kind of cool, and hopefully I can get them to the conference. And that's a whole other story about just awareness of certain, you know, outside activities, you know, that they just wouldn't spread through the university emails and stuff like that. But yeah, it was just a lot. It's still a lot.

**Steven Jones**

What led to your decision to attend an HBCU?

**Student C**

It really wasn't my decision. Um, I didn't choose to go to Valley until June or July, after I graduated high school, and I feel like, I always tell people it was God, because I wanted to go to UGA. And I was, I was in UGA. I was ready to you know, pick my housing and so, all of that. But then it was like something, I don't know what happened, but something just told me to call Valley, and once I called Valley, and because I applied, I was in dual enrollment. So, I went to a career fair with HBCUs just because it was at my dual enrollment campus. So, I was like, I'll just apply. I applied and I got into Valley and other schools, but I never really thought about it because I wanted to go to UGA. So, when I called Valley, it was just like, you know, I'm just gonna call it and see, you know, what they're offering me. So, when I call them, the admissions counselor at the time, he was just very warm and open, you know, he just made me feel like okay Valley is gonna be your home, you know, we're gonna take care of you. You've never been to Mississippi, but Mississippi is a different place. And you will feel that that family-oriented love, and oh, okay, I kind of like this. Um, So, when I went for a visit, I was like, oh, you know,
this in the middle of nowhere, my city roots, I don't think I'll be able to, you know, last here pretty long. But like the people there, they were warm, and they were warm. And I still think about it, like they are still warm to me now that they know, you know, how I identify, but before, it was like different, you know, they didn't really think, you know, they just assumed that. You know, I was straight, you know, I was nothing, you know, outside of the quote unquote norm. But now, like, you know, they still ask me questions. It's like, I'm like in the room, and it's, it's, it's just weird now, but that's why I decided to go to Valley because it was like home, homie. And they made me feel welcome. Yeah.

**Steven Jones**

Okay.

**Student C**

Oh, and I was offered a scholarship, so a scholarship plus that feeling, and I wouldn't be, you know, at UGA, I felt like this is where I wanted to be because it was cool, like the school was cool, and you know, this is just what I've known forever, but Valley really made me feel like warm and oh, I can you know, make an impact here and stuff like that. So, at the end, that's what made me choose Valley and stay at Valley because there was some times I was like, you know, I got to go back home.

**Steven Jones**

Wow. What led to that?

**Student C**

Once I was fully who I was, like, I always was who I was, but once people really knew, you know, when I started to get the side eyes, when certain faculty, you know, it was, I'm bringing my city views and stuff like that. It was just like a lot. And I was just like, overwhelmed because I didn't have the people to talk to like my friends, they couldn't really understand because they weren't experiencing it, you know, they didn't identify. So, I really didn't have people to talk to there. That could just help me through some of the things, some of the things I seen other people go through. It was just like, this is not a place where I feel, you know, safe to be fully who I am, you know, but then I met certain faculty, certain teachers that I could talk to, even though they didn't identify as LGBTQ. Like they were more open to our conversations; to the things that I wanted to bring to campus; and then I was like, okay, I can stay. I just have to fight a little harder now, you know, but sometimes you just find some of the sunshine in the rain.

**Steven Jones**

A little a little positive in the midst of all the negative, right?

**Student C**

Right.
**Steven Jones**

So, tell me about your coming out story. How was the first discussion about your sexuality, whether it was with friends or with your parents? Tell me about that first time, that first conversation.

**Student C**

So, I'm not gonna really talk about with my parents because that was like different because my parents were just accepting. Um, and then like, now that I kind of look back on it, pretty much every, like my friends were accepting to, like my friends said they always knew. So, it was just like casually like, introducing them to the people that I talked to, or like my friends, and then like, they put two and two together. I never just had to say, until I went to Valley, how I identify. It was just like, oh, that's Student C, you know, we're cool with it. But when I was at Valley, I just had to keep So, telling people no. That's not how I, you know, no, I don't date men. No, you know, like a lot of things that they tried to force on me. That's how it really came out. It just wasn't like, hey, I'm Student C and I identify as queer. It was just a lot of just shooting down a lot of the assumptions about me on campus. And then standing up like, in meetings and stuff, like, when certain things are said, and I'll just stand up and speak on it. People would start saying, oh, she must identify, and that's how it got around campus. And then I just, you know, confirmed some of the people that came and asked me, it wasn't really like a post or, you know, gathering everyone around or anything like that. It was just like, the things that I spoke out on and the assumptions, stuff like that. So, I've kind of had it like, easier. That's why I kind of like, pushed a lot of the people that I know, to respond to your email before I responded, because I'm like, I feel like your story should be heard a little bit more than mine. So, that's why I hope you got a lot more responses from Valley.

**Steven Jones**

Yeah. Well, you know its kind of interesting you mentioned that because I have interviewed an individual from Valley. It's another female as well. And I was hoping I was like, man, well, hopefully, I can also get a male's perspective because it seems like from the literature, and what we do see out there, no disrespect to you, but it seems like the women get it easier than the men do. It would be good to see it from both ends of the spectrum. Hopefully, I will get a male to eventually email me because I think that would really make it whole.

**Student C**

Okay, and I'll keep pushing too because I know some, so I'll just drop it again. And then and not even to just say that the male experience is more challenging, it's just like how people perceive the difference between a man and a woman. Like for us, for me, it was just like, oh, she just hasn't, you know, been around the right type of male. Like that has been like my whole story. And then because I, I'm a cisgender woman, it's like, okay, people don't, when they see me, they just see I'm a woman and I'm black. But for my friends that are like non-binary or they present themselves more masculine as a female, I see how they get treated a little bit more harsher than I'm treated, even if we're in the same setting, you know, so that's that there. I wouldn't say like all men because some of
my male friends who present themselves in a masculine way, they don't really get the backlash either. Even if it's known that they do identify as LGBTQ. Like if they can present themselves as masculine all the time, then I see on campus people don't really pick on them or say things about them verses some of my male friends who identify as she, her, or more feminine, you know, so I just really think it is who, on my campus, this is at Valley, whoever can fit their gender the best, those are the people who have the less challenging experiences on my campus. And that's even for, and I do a lot of diversity and inclusion within the Greek life on my campus, so I can really speak to that. The organizations on my campus, and who they allow, you know, to infiltrate their organizations who are who identify as LGBTQ, they look like me, you know, they can pass, their passers. And even when they're in their organizations, they don't really speak up as much as you know, a LGBTQ person on campus. But when we're talking: when we're mingling; you know, I can see and I can feel that we feel safe amongst each other, to speak out and to voice our opinions on certain things. But when we our whole group, and my friends that are, well not even my friend, the people in these organizations who, you know, identify, they can pass as, you know, cisgender, then it's just like, you know, they don't really speak up as much. And that's what really kind of bothers me in Greek life on my campus because they feel like, I don't want to say that they're going to be reprimanded, but it's just like, it's a, it's an unsaid thing that you, you don't speak on it, because this is not how they want their organization to be portrayed. And I hear a lot of that from the students on my campus about why they don't join certain organizations. So, it's just like the, the unsaid rules on my campus that just make, make us feel like we have to be silenced. That's why I'm so grateful that I come from a family of support, because I am able to speak out and I really, you know, I have that, if I do say, that privilege of not being, you know, silenced or bullied into silence because of how I appear, so I can speak a little bit more without people, you know, not listening to me, if I do say that, if that really makes sense, um, but sometimes it is hard. And sometimes I did take the backseat, because I wanted people, certain types of people in the LGBTQ community to speak up. So, a lot of times I did sit back and it kind of was the wrong decision because they didn't speak up so we weren't really heard. But at the same time, I know that my privilege gets, our privilege and sense of like, how I identify and how people perceive me, that that sometimes was like, I just felt like it wasn't my place to speak, you know, because I can pass but what about my friends they can't pass. You know, so it was just like an internal battle there. Like, do I want to speak up here, even though it doesn't involve me like, a lot of the conversation around our housing on campus? Uh, like stuff like that, like, even though it doesn't affect me, it affects my, you know, my sisters and brothers in the community. And I'm just like, am I the right person to speak on that, you know, so that was a lot of my experience. It's just, when do I speak? How do I speak? And like getting the, like, to get these resources, especially when the community is so small at my school, even though it's growing is still small, and just trying to get people to understand like, you know, it's like we are community within this black community. So, within this HBCU experience, you still have community, we have, I feel like our international students get, you know, more resources and opportunities to have their voices heard than the LGBTQ+ community on my campus. And it's just like, I just don't understand, like, why can't we have those and that's why I like I kind of the
whole, I don't even want to say recruitment because that kind of sounds bad, but just like gathering more students who identify, so we can have, like this diverse voice, and I'm not always the one, you know, speaking because certain things I don't know, like, I don't know how to, you know, experience as a gay male on campus or a trans person. And certain things I really can't speak knowledgeable about, but I have, I feel like I have to speak about it, because that kind of deters a person if they feel like this campus, this school doesn't have, you know, the support or resources to support people like me, they don't want to come to the campus. So that's kind of like recruitment and retention there too. Yeah, that's my experience.

**Steven Jones**
So, if you if you could change one or two things about your college experience, what would it be? And why?

**Student C**
One or two things? Um, definitely I would have started earlier, my advocacy for my community because like I said, you know, I can pass so it really wasn't a priority for me at first because when I was a freshman, it wasn't that many people who were open, open and who identified. So, it was like, okay, this is okay, if we don't really have as much; have a safe space resources; or you know, people that we can confide in. I was like, okay, it's okay. And I didn't really think about it. But as I started to, as I got older, and as I've seen, like freshmen and sophomores under me come in, then we always hung out. So, you have like, you know, what, where we are, what we do. And so just seeing like, okay, this is where we're hanging out at. And these are the people that frequent, you know, where we hang out at. This is how we feel when we go to certain places on campus. Okay, it's becoming an issue now, like, certain kids like, oh my gosh, so we had like a talent show. And it was freshmen, these freshmen boys, they were dancers, and they were gay men. And the faculty was just like, they cut their piece because they were like, no, this is not, you know, this is not what we're doing. And I'm like, even like expression, let these kids express themselves even if that's not how, you know, if you don't believe in men twerking or you don't want, you know, to see things like that that's their talent. That's what they're expressing. Like, it was just hard to see faculty tell them no, like, openly say no. I just realized, okay this work must be done. Like, what can I do to have students who come in, young students, older students, alumni, just feel like okay, I can be seen; I can be heard; I can be myself, express myself. I would change that, so if I could go back as a freshman and start the work then, I would, um, and just. I don't want to say change the, the, the mentality or the culture of the Delta, because the culture is what makes the school so family oriented. You know, feel good and that southern hospitality and stuff like that. But there are some ideologies that, you know, the close mindedness, that's what I would, you know, work on or I would change about the community, which, in turn, it flows into the campus. So even if, you know, my campus is open-minded, if the community that we serve or that we're in isn't open-minded, it really just washes out all of the work on campus, you know, because once we leave our campus and we go to like the stores or the events, off campus, then what? So not only on my campus, but the community that we live in; just the open-mindedness of queer people and LGBTQ+ people.
Steven Jones
Okay, so you mentioned the talent show. You talked about how faculty responded, what was the response from the student body?

Student C
Okay, so as soon as it started, the dudes; I'm not gonna say dudes going to be dudes, but the dudes were just like, "uh going to, we don't want to see that." It was an open outburst. That's what really shocked me, the open outbursts of it all. And nobody was like, no, don't say that's wrong. It was nothing like that's wrong towards the people that were talking bad on these students, it was more of the students who were expressing themselves. So, for me, I'm like, Oh, no, let's like stop. Some people openly shouted, "gay" and stuff like that, and I'm just like, at this big college age, you know, like, we're trying to educate ourselves. Then we're at an HBCU so that was like, kind of like hard for me there. So, like speaking to the faculty after that, it was just like, first of all, I'm a student. So trying to talk to be a student to talk to faculty, and then being older faculty, I it was so many barriers there, but it had to be done and even like other organizations like SGA, Royal Court, being able to express yourself in these organizations, it was just like, it's not like it's not, um, it's no secret that you can't like is known, like, if you're in then it's more of like a male thing because I've seen like, women who identify or present themselves more masculine, they can like something like they can read their expression in and out, but on the other side of men wanting to wear makeup, or men being, you know, openly out, they don't really get these, these positions. You know, they don't really get the attention that they, the support that they need.

And it's just, it's one thing for it to be like under the rug, but it's like open and outward, you know, the faculty or the organization advisors to not saying anything about the blatant disrespect of a student's expression. So that's just, that's like the hard part about it, and how, you know, it's the expression of the students in the community, how we're treated, basically, like it's nothing in place. Along the lines of bullying, yeah, but it's just not bullying as in the forms of because of my, you know, sexual orientation or something like that. It's just like, don't make them feel bad, it's not, don't call them gay, you know, stuff like that. Yeah, that's that.

I wish I could go back like now and just be on the campus and do the work. But yes, definitely, it's nothing that's frowned upon to be to be hateful of the community, is not frowned upon at all on our campus.

Steven Jones
Wow. So, would you say that that correlates with homophobia?

Student C
Yeah, definitely. Oh, yeah.

Steven Jones
Wow.
Student C
Even to say I don't, I don't want to say like the, the executive administration is homophobic, but to have a campus, a college campus and not have diversity in the staff. Like, I don't know if it's, if we have faculty that are just not open, but to have like nobody on campus that identifies with certain populations of your student body, that's like really what it's like confusing to me. Because we don't have any faculty that you know, are a part of the community. We do have faculty that will support us. Don't get me wrong, we do have faculty that support us and who are there for us, but their representation is not there. And it's not there in a way that it can be seen. Like, like in like, student, what do you call it, like in student affairs, like people that interact with students the most? No representation; it's not talked about, um, I just don't feel like students are supported in that manner, in like coming from faculty. We did just have our intramural sports director; she just was hired and she's open openly gay. But this is an it's like, yeah, this isn't like one aspect and it's not really talked about. Even she doesn't really, you know, talk about, you know, the resources that we have on campus for the LGBTQ+ students. So it's just like, yeah, we do have her, but we don't have people who are in these positions to, you know, create these resources for us; advocating for us, basically, I don't feel like we have people on campus that advocate for us in spaces that we need to be advocated for.

Steven Jones
So, this question you kind of answered, but I would like to see if you want to expound on that a little bit more. But what is the campus environment like for LGBTQ students at your institution?

What's the culture like? Beyond the fact that we know that there could be homophobic acts that are occurring. But from an overall holistic standpoint of the college experience, what is the culture like for an LGBTQ student?

Student C
Well, it's kind of hard. Like I said, we do have those communities with like within ourselves where we feel safe so where we can, you know, it's a circle or just like a community or tribe, like we know each other, we know, you know, who we can go to who experienced, you know, we know each other there. So, it's a community there, and it's a safe haven there. And even, even within that, I've seen that in-state students. And it's just, it's like a lot of factors that go into this. So like, the in-state students have, like, in-state LGBTQ+ students, some of them, like still have, like, it's like homophobia within the community sometimes, because I've seen like girls say certain things about the guys who express themselves, like, but I'm like, okay, we're in the same community like so like for you to say something about him or for him to say something about you, it is just like, okay, that's like we're fighting each other, and then trying to fight the campus. So that's there. That's that there. But I still feel like it is like a safe space within that community. Like, that's kind of rare. It's still a safe space there. But in regards to the culture on campus, like I said, like, I don't think it's like, I don't think like, personally, I don't feel targeted, and I don't feel unsafe. But I do know we have students on campus, and faculty on campus, that you know, will say things aloud; will side eye you; will
probably even, um, not give you the same opportunities. So, although it's not bad, it's
there, and it's not talked about, the LGBTQ+ community is not talked about. So, when it's
not talked about, then you give students the openness to blatantly say hurtful things to be
hateful. And it's nothing in place that tells them, no, you don't do that. Oh, my goodness,
so we had a safe sex seminar and we weren't represented at all. Like the planning of it all,
like I was talking to the committee for it, and I'm like, okay, so if we're going to talk
about sex, we have to be inclusive of all types of sex. So, like, certain, I just, I can't
really, really explain it without just being upset about it, but it was it was just a lot. So,
it's just like, even though it's inclusive, but it is not inclusive, but it's not hateful. Like it's
not totally like we hate the LGBTQ+ community, but when you're not seen or heard,
that's hurtful, you know? I don't mean to cry. I'm sorry.

Steven Jones
Take a minute. You know, I'm kind of speechless. Some of the things you said, I just
would not have ever thought that students in this day and age would still be experiencing
those things on college campuses.

Student C
Right. Like, you would think, and then you would think that is not, you know, something
that we would still have to deal with. And even a lot of friends like our more progressive
campuses, you know, it's like seeing where they are, and then looking at us is like, wow,
we're the youngest HBCU, but still we're years and years behind in certain stuff.

Steven Jones
So, what does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging
on campus?

Student C
For right now, personally, I just don't feel like our campus is really active and feeling like
we belong. Even though they don't. It's not like they don't make it a mission to feel like
we, to make us feel like we don't belong, but they also don't make it a priority to make us
feel like we belong, if that makes sense. Like, it's no. Like I say, if we're not talked about,
then it's like we're not there. And we're not talked about enough. And sometimes like, I
just want the students on campus to get a little more fired up about, you know, the
representation. Um, and I really feel like it's just like, where we are, like our college
campus of why, you know, students feel like, as long as you know, I can be who I am
sometimes, it's okay. Because even within the community, you know, it's not really like,
oh, I feel like we need this so I'm gonna advocate for this. It's not a lot of that either. And
maybe it's because of like, the culture on my campus of, you know, we're not at like,
you're not seeing it. I mean, you're not hearing stuff like that. I don't know what it is, but
just, I don't know if it's just where I'm from, my upbringing of like, being able to fully
express yourself and being talked about and heard, and seen and stuff like that, but I just
feel like it's even though it's not hateful, it's just like, we're not going to talk about it, you
know?
Steven Jones
So, let me rephrase my question in a more direct way. Where I'm not talking about all LGBTQ students. Let's take it slowly and say first, do you feel a sense of belonging at Valley?

Student C
I would say yes and no in certain spaces, in certain spaces. Because I don't have like, in certain, like places on campus and certain activities and organizations, I don't always have to show up, as you know, queer Student C. So, in the spaces where I don't have to, you know, show up as queer Student C, yeah, I feel a sense of belonging. But when I feel like I have, you know, that part of my identity has to be shown or I have to talk about certain issues, then it's like, uh, here she goes again, you know, so I don't feel like I belong, you know, instances like that. So, imagine if that, you know, if I had to, like, show up 24-7, like if that when you see me, you can automatically know, then just imagine, you know, I don't feel like and I don't want to, because I can't speak for people that aren't so I'm not even gonna say that. But for me, it's just in certain spaces.

Steven Jones
Right? So, let's look at it this way. Because we know that you do advocacy work, if you went to the administration and said, hey, we would like to host a gay pride this year. Would that be something that would be accepted at Valley?

Student C
No. Okay, so in our efforts to get a LGBTQ+ organization recognized as an organization on campus. That's what we've been doing, and the communication, to certain faculty, administration, it's just been hard to communicate there. So that's been hard. And then like, I don't think the student body would be receptive of events like that. If that answers your question, like from a student perspective, I don't think it'd be receptive, receptive. And the administration-wise, is hard like it's hard work. Because they always say like, we're student focused. So, like if the student body is it, like, if it's not going to serve the whole student body or the whole student body, you know, will participate, then they really don't try to do events like that. They try to, you know, do events that's gonna serve the whole student body. And that's really, and that's like something that are frowned upon there because, even though we're all black, you have black Catholics, you have black, like, we're in the religious space we have, we can have different events in a religious space. So, like, why can't we have different events in the sexual orientations space, you know? It's hard there. But since it's just like it's new work, like it's just that's another factor. So, I don't know if it isn't, it just is not how long is because, like we just started, or if it's just something that they're not ever gonna, you know, get on board with. So hopefully, you know, after we return to campus, and after this year of the students who took on the work, hopefully it's some, you know, positive stuff from administration side, but the student body side, I don't think it would be receptive right now. Simply because they don't know, and when you don't know, you can be ignorant towards something that you don't know. So, yeah.
Steven Jones
Okay.

So, what is the ideal HBCU experience for you and does your chosen HBCU, at Valley, meet the qualifications?

Student C
The ideal HBCU experience would be pro-black for me. And that means pro-women, pro-LGBTQ+, pro all things black. So anything that can fall under there, you know, any identity that can fall up under black, just being pro-that that would be the ideal HBCU experience and just being heard, regardless of who you are, as a student, I feel like your HBCU should hear you and then take the action to, you know, meet those needs or you know, meet those needs or anything that you're wanting, advocating for. And right now, I don't feel like my HBCU fits those qualifications; those needs; those requirements. And it's not saying that my HBCU is a bad HBCU, but when it comes to like the overall experience. Let me just say this. so at first, I didn't know what to expect from an HBCU because I've never thought of an HBCU, but throughout my four years, I have had the chance to go to various HBCUs in the south, and some not in the south, so I just see that my HBCU isn't what I would expect an HBCU to be, now that I know what you know, now that I have an idea of what an HBCU should be.

Steven Jones
Understood. So what LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus and what resources, if any, would you recommend establishing or implementing and why?

Student C
So at Valley, the only resources that I can really, I don't even think we have resources because even though they might say we have resources, like when it comes to like, mental health or safe sex, or you know, like the basic things that you have on all college campuses, it's not inclusive of the lives that we live, you know. So, like, we don't have like our mental health professionals, I don't think they're prepared to, you know, help us or talk to us. So even though they say it's there, I don't think it's adequate. That's what it is. I don't think it's adequate. And that's really it because it's not really, it's not talked about, so if it's not talked about, then we can't get the resources that we need. So, I would say like, at the basic level, what we need on campus is just awareness. Just something to say, we, we know you, you're here and this is what we can provide to you. You know, like you said, having organizations on campus. My school is what, almost 70 years old, and we've never had an organization on campus that supports the LGBTQ+ community. We don't have a Gay Straight Alliance, like we don't have things like that. So just having an organization on campus, that's one way to start. Then the student, like once you bring awareness to campus, I feel like the more that students know about us, and, you know, can understand like pronouns, that's a huge thing on my campus, that people just neglect, like, I didn't like being able to let people use the pronouns or identify how they want to identify like, that's just like something that you would think people would understand. But on my campus, it's just like, nobody can grasp the concept. So simple awareness and
then from there, we can, you know, build on that, like, housing. Housing is not inclusive at all my campus. Um, so we can build from there with that. But for the most part, just bringing, like the basic awareness, resources, a center would be great, but I know like with the funding and stuff, we don't have that right now. So just in like our, what do you call it? The Student Union and stuff, just having like, resources that can be picked up resources that can be seen, you know, like, if you walk by a flyer, you never get like, Okay, I'm reading this about pronouns, just walking by like, you don't see anything like that. But you know, you will see stuff that appeals to the hetero lifestyle, you can see things like that. So, just the basic awareness. That's where I would start with my campus, just basic awareness, um, and resources.

**Steven Jones**
So, that we're clear, to your knowledge Valley does not have a Gay Straight Alliance?

**Student C**
No.

**Steven Jones**
it does not have a LGBTQ Resource Center?

**Student C**
No.

**Steven Jones**
It does not have professionals who are strictly there to support LGBTQ students insofar is, for instance, counseling, an LGBTQ counselor, or a LGBTQ learning community in a residence hall?

**Student C**
Oh, no. No, we don't have that.

**Steven Jones**
Um, so let's talk about the housing experience because that's very big. We're talking about the student life experience. We, higher ed professionals, the biggest thing that we always look at is how we make the environment so holistic, that we get more students living on campus rather than commuting. Because we know that students who live on campus perform better; when they are engaged; when they are connected to the community, the hiring community. So, talk to me about the housing experience, you've mentioned a couple times in your conversation, that housing is just not adequate. But talk to me a little bit about that. Give me some examples.

**Student C**
So I would say that housing is an issue when it comes to the community because like, we have visitation rights, and you know, the opposite gender, like we only have single gendered housing, first of all, so my no co-ed, so we do have visitation, and you can have
anyone there but they have to be signed in. But I've experienced a lot of, for example, like having my gay friends, male friends, come visit me, it's a lot of like, I don't think they feel welcome there. One time a hall monitor said, "that gay boy is always up in here." You know just certain stuff like that, you know, that make you just not want to bring your friends to where you live or even come in there yourself, because if you're gonna call my friend out, you don't know if I identify as well. So, like you're hurting my feelings now. But you don't know you're hurting my feelings. So just with the So, staff and then some of my friends they don't feel safe, male friends, they don't feel safe in their dorms. But nobody talks about that. I'm pretty sure everybody knows because we have, like, I'm just gonna say it, some of the football players are homophobic, and they live in the same dorms as my friends. So it's just like, you know this but it's no conversation around like when we have like, dorm meetings or dorm activities, how to co-live with LGBTQ+, you know, just bringing awareness of the things that we you know, experience in these dorms like is like nothing talked about, and from my experience, like being a girl that lifestyle a community-style, communal bathrooms. I live in a dorm where it was like suite-style. So, we had like a little more privacy, but just going to my friend’s rooms, my friends live in communal-style. And you can like, it's just certain things that are said about like, living with LGBTQ+ students. And it's like, no, that makes no sense. Like, just because she identifies as lesbian doesn't mean that, you know, she's gonna try, you know, to make sexual advances towards you, you know. So, it's just like things they are about being comfortable going to the bathroom while a lot of people are in there. I have heard stories about that. So, like just making it comfortable, like you should be comfortable where you live. And as a whole, I don't think we're comfortable with how the living situation is on campus. And luckily for me, I was able to move into private rooms. So, I have my own room to myself, but that's expensive and no one should have to, you know, pay more money just to feel comfortable and safe. You know. And I know a lot of students in the community that opt out of communal and the suites-style living to live in the private room, just so they can be safe and be who they are. And, and that's another thing, you can find like most LGBTQ+ students heavily, either rooming together or rooming by themselves. And I don't think that's fair because you don't get to have the same, you know, like freshman year, how you all mix and mingle in your dorm and stuff. You don't, you don't feel comfortable like that. Because you never know somebody's just gonna yell out some homophobic slur or something, and now you're on the spot. Nobody wants to be on the spot, you know. So, I just feel like that how housing is on my campus. I would really love for it to be more inclusive, and I just think that starts with awareness. Like I said those resources. Um, so yeah, that's that with our housing.

Steven Jones
So, describe your level, described the level of faculty and staff supportive LGBTQ students at your institution. You kind of mentioned a little earlier about faculty, and some faculty being older and just kind of naive, and not really in support. And then there was another pool of faculty that you mentioned that were very supportive of LGBTQ+ students. You didn't mention any faculty that identify openly as LGBTQ. So, in your experience with faculty, what do you think?
Student C
They don't feel safe with being open. Because it's just like students. A lot of students at my school who like our alumni, they ended up coming back to work at the school, and in particular, it's two faculty that just came aboard, but they really aren't open. I just feel like that'd be huge. In you know, how are the LGBTQ+ student population on campus feels about our experience on campus. If we just had that representation for faculty level, but other than that, my experience with the faculty that supports the community, it's mainly been black women. Like, I'm not even gonna lie. I feel more comfortable around my black women professors, like talking about it, and knowing that they're gonna support me there, even if they don't identify verses other faculty on campus because it's been instances of, like, you just know, like certain staff, even if it's not like, they're not very blatant with it, that they just don't agree with it. And it's okay not to agree. Everybody isn't gonna be, you know, oh, yeah, we respect you and you know, how your lifestyle, but it's another thing to not agree with it and then be hateful. So, I feel like we have a lot of that within our faculty and being in the positions that I've been in, I've seen it, I've heard it. Like, it's like faculty to faculty more than it is faculty to students. But if you're talking about a certain population of students on campus, to other faculty, then that is where like the biases come in. Because now, if I'm a student sitting in your class, and you've had conversations about me and my sexual orientation, and things like that between you and another faculty, I just feel like that just brings in, and that's where, you know, the teacher who says something about my city views. Because my first year at Valley, it was like, yeah, like I was going to speak out about a lot of things that was like, unspoken of on campus. So, a lot of my teachers like, they knew that about me and I feel like that was like, it was like a lot of bias about certain things when we talked about like, it was just a lot of underlying things. Because now my professors knew how I identified and what I would speak up on, things like that. So, um that's how my experiences is with faculty. Like I said, it's not really like hurtful hurtful or hatefu hafeful, but it's there.

Steven Jones
So, if you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why?

Student C
Are you familiar with like the saying of "woohoo child, the ghetto?" I would really say that not because, like, the connotation around ghettos, but it's just like, a lot of things that you have to fight for. It just makes you exhausted. But it's fun, you know, like, who, like it's a fun experience. But then when you have to try dismantle things, then you're just like, "woohoo child", like this is too much. So that would be. I don't. That's my one word; I'm sorry, but that's how I would describe my college experience.

Steven Jones
Okay.
So, thinking back to when you first decided to attend Valley, and given your lived experience on campus as an LGBTQ student, did you make the right choice to attend Valley?

Student C
No. And I don't mean to laugh, but after I went to the HRC HBCU summit. Yeah, it was the fall semester. And just having conversations with these students like it wasn't just seniors. It was sophomores all the way up to seniors that were at this summit, and just hearing their experience as a LGBTQ+ student on their campuses, I'm like, oh, you know, like, I was like, that's some good stuff. That's some privilege there. My campus would never, so like Dillard, their president speaks about the community. So, going to a school like that, I would just, you know, that will be the better choice. If I would have done more research about HBCUs and their work with, not even with, but like their resources and the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, I probably wouldn't have chosen Valley. But at the same time, I feel like I needed to choose Valley because of the type of person I am, Valley needed that. Like, if I never would have came, maybe we never would have started the conversation or maybe the conversation would have been started. I would never know, but I feel like with me being there, it was a little bit. It got the ball moving a little bit more. But if I had to choose, I would choose to go to a school where that work was already started. And where I can feel a little bit more supported. Yeah, and seen and heard. So, I probably wouldn't have chosen Valley.

Steven Jones
So, what does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

Student C
Oh, it looks like okay, so I know that HBCUs are predominant for black students, but all black students, like you have like different blacks. And when I say blacks, like you have the black blacks, who are like the black Americans; and then you have like, the Caribbean, the African blacks. So, like, I feel like that's an experience there. And then we have international students. So, where you are, where you have resources and people and communities where all of these different types of students can feel safe, seen and heard. Because although we're all black, and although we all chose to come to a HBCU, we all came there for different reason. And instead of lumping students into one category, I feel like the inclusive HBCU would understand, okay, we have different students with different identities that cross paths. So how can we best serve these types of students, even if you just have five students, and like, I don't think, my campus is very disable accessible. So even if you just have five students who are disabled, I feel like your campus should be able to include them. So just being aware of the different types of identities that you have on your campus and not being afraid to, you know, serve those students, even if it's like, contrary to popular norms or beliefs. That's what really makes it an inclusive HBCU and then having those people in the room to make these decisions; whether it is based on gender, race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation; like just having these people there, that can speak on behalf of how they identify, not people, like, I love a good ally, I really do. Don't get me wrong; but sometimes, you need the voice that
comes from the source, you know? So yeah, that would be what makes a very diverse and inclusive HBCU campus. For me, in my, my thoughts.

**Steven Jones**
So, I think we might have mentioned this, but I'm going to ask the question just because I see it on here. How often does the institution offer LGBTQ-related activities, events, or programs on campus? Do you recall any?

**Student C**
No. It's sad because I don't. I do like coming from like, not university-sponsored; that's what I'm gonna say, not university-sponsored. But I do recall a few events, and I think we sponsored these events. But it was still like, my organization that, my sorority, like, we did a few events. But I feel like that does not counts. Because it was like me, or like the community.

**Steven Jones**
But none from the college; so, the college has not provided these types of events?

**Student C**
No, no university-sponsored events.

Okay.

**Steven Jones**
Would you recommend your HBCU to other prospective LGBTQ students? Why or why not? If you honestly think about what you've experienced there, would you recommend Mississippi Valley State University to another perspective LGBTQ student preparing to enter the college environment?

**Student C**
Yes, but only like, the students that are ready to do the work, because like I said in the beginning, if I would have known that there were other schools that have already started the work, and they were more far along, before, like, just as the person that I was coming out of high school, if they're the same type of person I was coming out of high school, then no.

But if they're ready to get their, you know, their hands dirty and do the groundwork and are ready take on the big giants, then I would recommend my school because there's a lot of work that needs to be done. And I feel like it has to, it has to be done in one way or another. So, students that are ready to be those change agents, yes.

But students who you know, even though they still want to be change agents, but they want it not from the ground. Like literally from the ground up, then I wouldn't recommend school for like a place of belonging and feeling seen and heard and stuff like that. I wouldn't recommend it to another LGBTQ+ student.
Steven Jones
So, um, think about this situation before I asked this question. If you were sitting in a conference room with the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Chancellor or the president of college, and other stakeholders of the college, you know, would be able to make things happen. Okay. What can your HBCU do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students? If you were talking to your president, President Briggs, and you were talking to Dr. Gibson, and other various stakeholders of the college, what can they do to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students?

Student C
Give us, like, a resource center, a safe space on campus. Um, just allow us to be able. Just allow us a space on campus where we can first feel comfortable. And once we're comfortable, and we can be ourselves wholly, and just have like, the resources that we need to thrive in school, because being an LGBTQ+ student, in this day and age is hard, then put the classes on top of that, and then, like college is a social experiment, basically, so just all of those factors, it can be overwhelming. So, a resource center that can serve that type of, those types of experiences, even though we do have that on campus it's not like for like LGBTQ+ students. So, a resource center. And from there, I feel like once we're comfortable, and we're seen and heard, then we can do, you know, we can go about other students, you know, being able to talk about it, being able to see us and have that awareness of the community, if we just had a space on campus where it's like, hey, this is where you can come and just kick back and chill without being, feeling like you have to shrink yourself, or you know, that you're being watched or something. So just a space. Let's just start with a space. Just give us a space of resources that we can use to thrive.

Steven Jones
Okay. Alright.

So, have you ever witnessed or been a victim of homophobic acts on campus? If yes, tell me about those incidents.

Student C
I have. I witnessed it, and I think we kind of talked about it, like how the faculty discusses the community. Even though, it's like hushed and on the side, I've experienced that and having to speak up in those instances. I've witnessed, like I said, the football players, you know, just homophobic slurs, and not being reprimanded, given consequences and just seeing how that affects the LGBTQ+ students. I have had people come to me, the effects of it, I get more of the effects side more than in the moment. So, it's just been like a few instances where I've seen like homophobic, people being homophobic, more so than I get the effects of it. So, like the students that come to me and are rehashing their experiences and how that made them feel. And you know, students that want to go home, you know, stuff like that. I get more of that. So, I don't know if I can really answer that question.
Steven Jones
So, based on those effects that students come to you with, what's some of the craziest things, or some of the most homophobic, some of the most serious things that you've probably had to deal with or listen to or comfort a student on at Valley?

Student C
So, for me, I think the most outrageous, oh my gosh. It was a freshman, a gay male on my campus, had an incident with his roommate, where his roommate was just very very homophobic and he would just throw, hash out homophobic, homophobic slurs at him, and not want to like let him in a room if he left his key and stuff like that. But the freshman was, I guess not comfortable in speaking with the staff, so it was just very hard to get him to report. So that I think that's another thing that I don't know if we talked about is the reporting side of it, and how certain students don't feel comfortable reporting to faculty. I don't think we talked about that. But just like having, like, getting this student to understand like, is not because of something you did, and you should feel comfortable in your room or in your housing. And to tell him and get yourself removed from that situation or get the roommate removed from the situation. And just start, like, just dumb things.

Like, he was telling me how the roommate was like, telling him about doing him in the... it was just a lot. I don't even want to repeat it, but like living with someone who doesn't respect you, basically that was like one of the worst instances that I've had to listen to. And then the student just being so uncomfortable reporting it, and then having to go the whole semester, the whole year in that room. And it's a whole process of moving your room. So, it was just like you went a whole semester, sometimes, you know, he came to my room, you know, since I live by myself, so it was just like to be paying for something that you're not comfortable being in, but not thinking that you have the resources, you know, there in place to protect you. Those are like the, the stories or the events where it's just, like, outrageous for me and it's like, wow. But you can't really do nothing, like, if you're in my space in my place, you can't really do anything if they're not recording it, because then the university isn't seeing the data, even though we should be, believe like, yeah.

Steven Jones
Right.

Student C
Students are saying this, but it's like the paperwork, the incident reports aren't being recorded. And it's kind of hard to like back up why we need this. So yeah, those are, yeah.

Steven Jones
Wow. So, you mentioned football players and them, you know saying homophobic things? Have they ever done that in front of faculty, staff, or administrators and get away with it?
Student C
Nope. Well not done in my experience. Most of the times it's like in housing or in the cafe, and even though those faculty and staff, like the done cafeteria workers are in there, like it can clearly be heard. If that can be an example, then yeah. But most of the times, it's just like around like the student body. So, if we're in the Student Union, and the cafe, like where it's mainly students, it’s heard there. Even though there's faculty there. I don't know if they heard them, but I think that you can hear in proximity you are to the students, where we gathered, I feel like you can hear. Like, you can clearly hear it. It's not like, you'll get an older lady in the cafe that will say something, or report, of say something like, "I will tell your coach" or something like that like. Like you're abusing students or something like that. But it's nothing like really big. I don't think, in my experience of like, witnessing, where it's like I'm clearly about to, you know, approach you and tell you, you know, just I don't think it's consequences. Like, that's what it is, even if they are spoken to, I don't think its consequences because if you get to play on Saturday, or you still have a scholarship, like it's just certain things, I don't really think it's consequences. Even if it is like faculty hears it or witnesses it, I don't really think it's like consequences or it is reported. It's more so, step into my office, let's talk about it type.

Steven Jones
Okay, so a follow-up question to that would be, how successful are faculty in preventing homophobic acts in the classroom?

Student C
Again, from my experience, like the classrooms I've been in, I've only had, I've only been in classrooms with mainly black women professors. So, like, that's like a different experience because from my like, from my experience, they're more understanding and they're more supportive. So, it's going to be different. The culture is set in those classrooms, like, this is like, it's a safe space. Like, this is what we can do and this is what you're not going to do in this space. Um, but other classes like other classes where it like general education classes, like art classes and stuff like that, that I've been in. I'm trying to think instances in other classrooms where it's been like homophobic instances. I don't think it's really happened to me in the classroom. It's mainly been around campus, like in student areas. So yeah, from my experience, the professors, in the classrooms I've been in, they've been pretty successful at handling those situations and setting the foundation and culture of the classroom so those things won't happen. So being more proactive than reactive, they've been pretty successful with that, in my experience.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, what steps do your institution take to ensure campus safety for all students, including LGBTQ students?
**Student C**
Um, okay, repeat it one more time.

**Steven Jones**
Sure. What steps do your institution take to ensure campus safety for all students, including LGBTQ students?

**Student C**
Well, our police department, they're very open, well, they try to be very open in making students feel comfortable coming to them to talk about anything or report anything. And that's another thing like, with the inclusion and diversity of like the departments on campus, even though it's open, and they say that they make it, they try to make it feel open and inclusive. The department is full of cisgender heterosexual males. So, if you're in a position, like I am, or one of my male friends who presents more feminine, like, are you really comfortable? Like, even though it's open? Are you comfortable, you know, so that's a step that our institution needs to take, having the police department open, having people that you like, even though they're approachable and things like that, it's just certain like that aspect is still there. Like it's mainly one population there to serve the various different populations on campus. Um, our Vice President of Student Affairs, like she has an open-door policy. Even in our like non-discrimination statements, like it's there, it's written, but I don't think it is enforced.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. So, my last two questions. Tell me about your experience in interacting with heterosexual students on campus.

**Student C**
My experiences have been pretty pleasant. Considering, you know, how I present myself; how I can pass or whatever. Pretty pleasant. I'm trying to think. I get along with a lot of students on campus. Pretty pleasant is what I'll say.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so my last question is, you mentioned reporting and you mentioned that there were issues around that, in terms of, LGBTQ students feeling comfortable with going and reporting things. Talk to me about that a little more. Why do you think that it's such an issue on campus? Why do you think it's such an issue for any LGBTQ student, whether male or female? Why do you think it's such an issue for them to go and report things that are being done to them?

**Student C**
Like I said, first of all, the reporting process, I feel like it could be better, like it's just is drawn, I feel like there's too drawn out and sometimes students just don't want to go through that process. And then second, coming from like, a female perspective, a woman's perspective. Um, it's not like domestic violence between women, um, women on women relationships is not taken seriously on campus. So, I remember my, it was my
sophomore year, like it was a dispute in the women's dorm between this couple, but it was like it was reported, but it wasn't taken seriously. It was jokes around campus about it, you know, just being a cat, a girl fight and stuff like that. Like it's, it's not really taken seriously. So, people try and they don't really report it because it was held more so as like a fight, more than it was domestic violence if you really understand that. Um, then it's not like talked about so like, when we have like domestic violence seminars, it's very hetero normative. Like, the hetero lifestyle is not really inclusive of, I feel, my experiences, as a queer woman or you know, LGBTQ+ person. Um, so that that I feel like that's why a lot of people don't report because it just takes long time and stuff isn't taken seriously in certain situations. And then fear, like I said, the police department is mainly a cisgender heterosexual man. So, for my friend who was living in a male's dorm and was being harassed by his roommate, you know, your roommate is cisgender heterosexual man, and you're going to report this to another, you know, you just don't feel comfortable. And maybe if we had, like, people dedicated to our lived experiences there, it would be a little better, you know, reporting because we will feel comfortable and feel like they understand, like certain people don't understand. They might, you know, you know, welcome us to dialogue and conversation, but they don't understand. So, I feel like that really, those are like the top things that go into reporting.

Steven Jones
So, you did say that Valley does not have LGBTQ safe spaces?

Student C
No.

Steven Jones
Okay. Got it.

Because that would serve that purpose. You know, if you feel you know, if you felt like someone was after you or you felt like you were unsafe, then you would go to that LGBTQ safe space, and that person can help you, so okay, got it. Anything else you would like to add?

Student C
Um, no, I don't think so. But keep on working at this because this was great. I feel like it was definitely needed.

Steven Jones
Thank you. Well, thank you so much.

Student C
Well, thank you so much.

Steven Jones
I appreciate it.
Student C
Same. Have a great day,

Steven Jones
Student D – Interview Transcript
Interview Date: Monday, June 8, 2020 at 6:00 P.M.

Steven Jones
How are you?

Can you hear me? You have to unmute your phone.

Student D
Can you hear me now? Okay.

Steven Jones
I can hear you now. Okay,

Awesome. Awesome. Well, thank you again for your interest in my study. I appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to meet with me.

Student D
No problem.

Steven Jones
I'm not going to waste too much of your time and we're going jump right into this thing. I know from our previous initial conversation you had confirm your age 18 or older. Can you just confirm that again for the record?

Student D
Yes, I am nineteen years old.

Steven Jones
Alright. And what college do you attend?

Student D
I attend Mississippi Valley State University.

Steven Jones
Alright. Awesome. So, we're going to jump right into the interview. I have twenty-five questions, and I promise you it sounds like a lot, but it really isn't. There is no right or wrong answer. I want you to be comfortable. I want you to feel as if the president of Mississippi Valley is in the room.

Student D
Okay.
Steven Jones
I want you to tell me, what you would actually tell them, if they were in the room. Okay, so we have the president, Dr. Briggs is in the room. He's really not, but let's just say he is. And then Dr. Gibson is also in the room. So as the Vice President of Student Affairs and the president of the college, these two individuals are here to hear your concerns as a LGBTQ student on their campus. I want you to feel very open about this conversation. I don't want you to hold back. I want you to tell me what you would tell the world to know. Agreed?

Student D
Agreed.

Steven Jones
Okay, cool. So, let's jump into it. Tell me a little bit about your background. Um, anything that you would like to share, but I'd like to also know what is your religious affiliation.

Student D
Okay, I'm from XXXXX Mississippi. It's a real small town. The population is not big at all. Basically, everybody knows everybody or they are related to everybody. My family is very known in the town. Um, my family is of the Christian belief. I also follow within Christian beliefs with my own twists on the be

I graduated from XXXXX High School. I was number nine out of my class and was supposed to be top ten, but we are not going to go there. I was always a very, let's say, above average student. Like, I was always a scholar. I was always in leadership positions. I always led the pack. But at a very young age, I was exposed to the fact that being an LGBT student did make you different. So, like, whenever I'll be asked to do something, because I was always told I speak really well. Especially for like a black young male, I speak extremely well. People will always come up to me asking me to do things, even in my church, and school, but when it came down to my face to be a part of something, I was never asked; or if I was to do something, it was always in the background. One of the biggest stories I always tell was, my senior year, I ran for Mr. XXX. For like the past few years, gay boys had won Mr. XXX. Usually if you were a gay boy in my school, like in each class for the past couple years, you only had one or two. It was always either one or two openly gay boys in a class. In my class, I was the only openly gay person, and I only had one other openly gay friend; who is actually beside me.

Um, when I ran for Mr. XXX, people really basically thought I had it in the bag, which I did too. That was the first year we did speeches to like, convince the voters. I had the best speech. I was original. Even teachers came and told me that. Everybody basically wanted me to win. Even staff members. Well actually, I didn't run for Mr. XXX, I ran for King. We have King and we have Mr. XXX. With Mr. XXX, they represent the school. They speak for the school and do all of that. At my school, they kind of dropped the ball and they got it to a point where King was looked at more than Mr. XXX. So, when I came up
to my senior year, I wanted to be king because I wanted the most important position. But the staff members was like, if I won Mr. XXX, then they would put Mr. XXX back at top, you know as top of the school because I had to direct the school and they knew I spoke well and I represented myself well. They actually wanted me to be Mr. XXX so bad, that was the first time they ever allowed you to run for two positions at once. But I was scared to do that because I didn't want to split the votes up. Like in case I got some people voted for me Mr. XXX, some voted for me as King and I cheated myself out. So, I only ran for King. Come to find out towards the end of my campaign, a boy ran, who was in my class, he was a football player, he wasn't active in school, sometimes barely came, his grades were not up to par. But he didn't even want to run and his mom actually made him run. And his mom actually had a position in the school. Her family helped him campaign. He never did anything. He came down for the time for votes to come in and them to announce the winner. Basically, everybody thought I had in the bag. And I have this little intuition thing where I kind of always know when I am going to lose something, and I lost. Everybody was like, even his friends were like, "how did he win, he didn't put in any work?" It was basically just like, I ended up finding out boys were going around making posts on Twitter like, "I have nothing against people, but I'm not gonna have another gay dude to represent my school." So, it was basically, I lost because all the boys didn't want another gay person representing the school.

Steven Jones
Wow.

Student D
Well, I have three siblings. I'm the baby. I'm very close with my oldest sister. She's like my best friend. I have a best friend and me and her graduated together as well.

Um, me and my brothers, we have an alright relationship. We're not the closest. Part of that being my sexuality, but they will always be there for me. Like, they're still my brothers. It's just we don't talk more. My mom and my dad. Me and my dad, it was a real road, let's say that. When I was young, he was like my hero. I was really close to him. Once I came out as gay, it like went down, and then it came back up to a point where we are good now. Like, we can talk and laugh. My mom, she had a problem, she also had a problem with it, but it's like, both of them came to the agreement that I'm their child regardless. So that's all that matters. Like, they may not like what I do, but they're not gonna let nobody hurt me. And as long as I'm safe, I'm happy, they good. And I also, like my grandmother, she's the same way. Basically, all my family knows. I'm openly gay to everybody. It's just like, a thing that they kind of just don't talk about, but everybody knows.

Steven Jones
Gotcha.

So, tell me what led to your decision to attend an HBCU?
Student D
Okay, so at first, I won't lie. In the south, they dropped the ball hard about teaching about HBCUs. Dropped the ball so hard to the fact that I didn't even know Morehouse was a real school until my senior year of high school.

Steven Jones
Wow.

Student D
Like, I just never knew. No one ever told me. People more than likely anytime that they talked about colleges, it was always go to Mississippi State, Ole Miss, things like that. My mom actually attended Valley and some of my other Auntie's or uncle's attended schools. I think I had another uncle who graduated from Valley. My dad, he didn't go to college, he went and became a police officer. And my siblings, my sister went to Mississippi State. My eldest brother, he bounced around from different schools, but he ended up graduating from Alcorn, I believe. My last brother, he didn't finish school, but he started. He went to Mississippi State as well on a football scholarship. My sister graduated, my eldest brother graduated, but my second eldest brother didn't graduate. So, when I started getting ready to look at schools, I was actually going to go to Mississippi State. But the reason behind it was, it wasn't because I was thinking about PWI or HBCU at the time. I wanted to be a veterinarian because I love animals. But and I knew that they had to the best veterinarian program. The thing was though, as I got older, I started realizing that I love animals, but I hate dissecting. So, I was like that's cutthroat. So, then I wanted to do fashion, which I'm heavy into fashion, but I was thinking like, instead of majoring in that, I want something more solid because I can always make fashion a side hustle, and Mississippi State also had a great fashion program. And plus, it was one of the only colleges that I ever knew.

Student D
Then it got down. And I went to this program from my freshman year to my senior year of high school Valley hosted a program, during the summer, like through the whole month of July. And it's called the HBCU T3 Program. It's like teachers teaching teachers, like college students get a chance to teach high school students. And within that program, I basically fell in love with Valley. Like I fell in love with the environment, the people, things were, you know, fitting me well down there. So that's kind of how I ended up making my decision. During my senior year we went to this thing. I don't know if you heard about it. It's like an HBCU program where they take you to different HBCUs in different states.

Steven Jones
Yes.

Student D
The one I went to was in Atlanta.
Steven Jones
Okay.

Student D
They took us to Morehouse, Spelman, Clark Atlanta, and Georgia Tech. When I went, I fell in love with Morehouse. And like most of my friends laughed at me because they thought it was just the fact it was an all-boys school, but it really wasn't because I don't even like boys. I can't be around boys for too long before I get irritated. But I loved Morehouse. It was something about it; the history; the vibe. Something about it made me want to go. But of course, by that time, it was a little late. I was in like the middle part of my senior year. I hadn't prepped to go somewhere like Morehouse. I didn't have the finances. So, I ended up basically, I don't want to use settling, but I basically settled at Valley. But I've enjoyed my time there. So, I will say it was a good decision.

Steven Jones
Awesome. So, what is your college major and your classification? I know you mentioned to me that you are a senior, right?

Student D
I'm a double major in math and speech communications and my emphasis is in broadcasting.

Steven Jones
So, what are your future aspirations professionally?

Student D
I want to become the male Oprah. That's the best way I can put it.

Steven Jones
Okay.

Student D
Not much into how she was but into so much as the empire that she built. Like, I want to be that person, that the child that I always looked for in a role model. I never really knew who a gay person was or what gay was until I got higher into my middle school years, like, I didn't even know who RuPaul was. And I wasn't raised around any openly gay children. So, it was just like, I didn't know what it was. I just knew kids call me that when they picked on me or whatever. I never knew what it was. So, I want to be that role model that I never had. And I want to be able to, you know, fix some hearts of people and explain to them that there is nothing wrong with it. It happens and it's nothing we can really change.

Also, I need the finances. I'm a person, I'm very mind-strong on being financially stable. I've struggled before. I don't want to go there again. I can't go back there. Plus, I have a lifestyle, and I have a lifestyle to maintain. So, I know what I want to do. But I basically
want to be the male Oprah, and another one of my inspirations is Don Lemon. With him being a gay man and journalism, and it's another woman, she's, um, she's does sports news. Her name is Maria. I love her and Anderson Cooper. But, yeah, those are some of my favorite people.

**Steven Jones**
Alright. Well tell me about your coming out story.

**Student D**
Okay, so I first came out to...

**Steven Jones**
I think your internet. I think we may be losing connection. Are you still there?

Yeah, I'm still here. I can see you and hear you.

Okay. Alright.

**Student D**
Okay. Um, it started off with my friends. My circle basically knew. My friends basically knew. It was just like, XXXXXX, we think Student D is just feminine. But I went ahead and told some of them, Nah, y'all, I like guys. Nobody really had a problem with.

I didn't really come out to people in my school because, the thing is, my dad works in the school. He's a XXXXXX. So, I couldn't say and do too much at school without him finding out. So, a lot of the kids were like, "why don't you just come out." But the whole time I'm like, is my y'all I care about. I care about if I was going to have a place to live if I do. Because I knew how my dad felt about him it, and I knew how my mom felt. So, I came out to my mom first. Me and my best friend's boyfriend, we had a little discussion, and he was basically just like, why won't you just come out, like everybody knows. Like, you ain't doing nothing but lying to yourself. I was like, y'all don't know what I am. So, why are y'all in my business. It don't matter. Like it shouldn't matter. And when I went home, I was basically like having this mental war inside of my head. And I was just like, "okay, you know what, I'm going go ahead and do this because I'm tired of lying to myself" And I felt like I was making my friend look like a fool. For the ones who did believe I was a feminine boy. I felt like I was making them lie. So, I went into the house, my mom was halfway sleep on the couch. I woke her up, and I said, "Mom come to the den." Because I needed time to think. She was in the living room, but I made her walk to the den and I sat down. She came in, she was like, "What do you want." And I was like, at the time I didn't say I was gay, I said, "Mom, I think I'm gay." She was, like, "okay...". She was very relaxed. But the thing is, I know my mom, my mom is very passive aggressive. She basically gave me, "Okay. You know how you were raised. You were raised in a Christian home. You know how we feel about it. I love you. You are still my child. I don't like what you do. But is as long as you know, you're still under my roof, so
you're still gonna follow by rules. You will still be attending church. And basically, that whole spiel. I said okay. Went to sleep. Woke up to texts from the whole family.

My sister, my brothers, my aunties and uncles. Everybody texted me. "So, you gay. So, you came out as gay?" I'm like, I know my momma didn't play with me like this. I ran into her room. I was like, Mom, did you tell everybody? And she was like, "what, you came out to me. Why can't they know. You telling me that everybody should know, right?" I realized at that moment it was a power move on my mom's part. She was like, since you are coming out, this is what you will have to deal with. I'm like okay. I kid you not, my mom taught me how to be the strongest person ever. So, she was like, "You basically want people to know, so this is what it's going to be." She said that she had told everybody but your dad. She said, "I want you to tell him." I told her that if she was going to tell everyone, she might have well told him. She knew, I want you to tell him. My dad, at the time didn't have the best relationship. So, I basically told her no it's not gonna happen. I don't care if he don't find out at all but I'm not saying to him. Everybody had like this little weird feeling about it. My sister, with her being my best friend, she had my back. She secured. Basically, if you are meeting me, you are meeting my sister. We are the same person. So, she had my back.

It was a basketball game approaching. Remember, I told you my dad was a XXXXXXXX, so he had to be at all the games. My dad is the type of person that's very protective, and this is a sidebar to just give you information into the coming out story. My dad was a bully in high school. My mom hated my daddy. But my daddy was a bully. He didn't like gay people. He didn't like nerds, all of that. He bullied people. My dad knew once he had kids, he told my mom, he said, "I know one of them is gonna reap from what I did in high school." So, he taught all of us how to box. The thing was, he just didn't know who it was gonna be. And it was like my older brother was everything my dad wanted him to be. He is a junior. My second brother, he was the rebel type, but he was what my dad wanted him to be a - football player. For me, I was the girly one. I was the feminine one. I wanted to be around my sister, my mom and do what they did. So, he knew it was coming. I grew up very aggressive. My dad never really had to worry about me too much because he knew I was a fighter. And it kind of jacked me up and rest in life, but it happened. So, once it came out to my dad, my dad had this thing in his way of protecting me was like, if I'm about to go out, I can always tell when I was cute, or I looked cute. My dad would beat me down, like he'll be like, why are you going out? Who are you trying to impress? Ain't nobody looking at you. Ain't nobody studdin you, but it was his way of saying, "Student D don't go nowhere. Stay in the house. Be safe, be good." And I was like, no, you think you going to use reverse psychology on me, but I created this. This is not going to be how that works. I said, nah, I'm still going. Just to let you know. I'm still going to the game. He paused in the middle of the doorway so that I couldn't get out and he was like, Student D, are you gay? I said, you don't want to know the answer to that. So, gone and leave me alone. He was like, Student D, are you gay? I said, "Dad, stop asking me that." He didn't. He once again said, Student D, are you gay? I said, why? What is it going to solve? He was like, I'm asking you a question, answer me. He said, Student D, are you gay? I said, you know what, yup. I have never seen my dad flip
out that hard. Like, flipped out. Like, starting destroying the house, flipped out. And like,
I knew how disconnected I had got from my dad in my head because, like, he told me one
of the worst things ever. My dad loved his father. Like, that was his role model. He
basically told me that me being gay was worse than his daddy dying. So, I was like, okay.
Instead of me crying, I burst out laughing in his face. I feel like that was my mental
mechanism, like to stop from crying, I just laughed. I also knew it was me being a bitch.
Cuz I was just like, since you did this, I'm gonna do this, and I busted out laughing in his
face. He like basically just stormed out and my dad didn't talk to me for months. My
mom kept trying, she would make me go in and take him his food, and I was like, "why I
got to do it?". He won't even look at me. He would just grab the plate and move on And I
was good with it, like, I had gotten to the point where I wanted to be happy with myself
so bad that I didn't care who suffer from it, and that was basically my coming out story.

Steven Jones
Wow, wow.

Well, if you can change one or two things about your college experience, what would it
be and why?

Student D
I would change the environment, one. Because Valley is so small that I still feel like I'm
in my hometown and it irks me because everyone thinks the same. Everyone dresses the
same. You have those people who stick out but those people still get made fun of, and
you would think you have variety at a college, but at a college like Valley, it is still very
Southern, hood mentality. I would change some of the people, because like I said, I want
to get to know people very every walk of life.
Because I'm, I'm a variety person. I'm everything you need in one. Like, I could watch a
musical. I could listen to the urban trap music. I can listen to, I mean, I can go look at art
and understand it. Like, I can do it all, and it all fascinates me. And it sometimes irks my
nerves that I got to have six different groups of friends to pique every interest.

Steven Jones
Right.

Student D
Um, I will also change some of the professors' mindsets because, don't get me wrong,
Valley has some of the nicest, bombest professors. I have met some of the greatest
professors who treat me like their own child. But, some, like, it's not a connect. Like, I
just feel like even though it's the job, true enough, and yes, you are a professor, and yes,
I'm your student, and yes, we have to stay on a certain basis. I still would like to feel like
you understand me. And you understand that I'm coming into my adulthood. And that me
and you can have a conversation. Me and you can have an understanding, and it be more
than just, okay, here. You get homework, bye, out of my face. Because teachers tell you
to come to their office, but then when you do, it's basically just a real dry interaction. But,
that's basically it. Just making it bigger and the people.
Steven Jones
So, expanding a little bit on what you just mentioned, what is the campus environment like for LGBTQ students at your institution?

Student D
It doesn't exist. But I will say, you have a small group of openly gay students, but you have a large group of DL students. And the weird part about it is, for them to be DL, everybody knows. Because like I said, the campus is so small, and nine times out of ten, as a gay person, when you find, like, that one good home girl, or most likely you friends with a group of girls, and sometimes, say like, especially if you haven't ever been in a relationship before something and you get feelings for this so called person, you want to tell somebody. And sometimes it's the wrong somebody, and people go around and they talk, and they spread. And the gay community at Valley isn't the tightest, but it's starting to become that way. Like I remember during the summer program, I met some of the elder gays on campus, and I got cool with them, and they welcomed me. They were nice. It wasn't a shady interaction. It wasn't messy. They was like, hey, Student D, they wanted me to hang around them, dance with them, talk with them, stuff like that. And it was a very like, I felt like I was making friends. I didn't feel like I had to be in a competition. That quickly changed once I got on campus. Um, I got cool with all of the gay boys once I got on campus. It wasn't many, but I got cool with the ones that were there. It was one boy in particular, we became friends, but then it slowly turned because he was one of those gay boys who feel like it's a very short amount of DL boys, and I want them all. Or he also felt like, "I want to be the top tier gay," and I'm like, it's not about that. Like, we already outnumber, I mean already, so we should be trying to be, you know, friends. He would go around to his other friends, like do you think Student D is cuter than me? Do you think Student D dress better than me? He tried to sleep around with one of his friend's boyfriend at the time. It was a mess. And like a lot of people fell out with him and they did him dirty throughout the year. And I didn't feel sorry for him because my thing is, you dug this grave for yourself. Us being LGBT students, we already looked at, like, do we really want to give them a chance and then you go and you do the most. Like, he would disrespect straight boys; and the thing about it is, I'm one of the gay boys that either love me or you hate me for no reason? Because I never bothered nobody. I barely speak to you if I don't know you, if I know that you have a problem with me. And most people, like everybody on campus basically love me; if you got a problem with me, I promise you, it's because they just want to have one. And when people meet me, it's always, oh Student D so cool. Student D makes me feel comfortable. Student D is himself, but he don't push it on me. He lets me except him for him and he makes me feel like I could come talk to him regularly. He's just a person, it's not he's gay Student D. I don't have a lot. I don't have a lot of straight friends. I don't, and like I told you, I don't like being around boys too much, because ever since I was younger, anytime I'm in an all-male space, they are always talking about me behind my back, whispering, trying to attack me, or it always become something that's aggressive and I don't feel like it.
So, on campus, when I got cool with the gay boys, I thought it was gonna be, like this you know, group and I was gonna feel, how they feel like out of college movies. When all the groups click up and you have this really close-knit group of friends, but it wasn't that for me. It was, like, we were cool, but we was cool when we seen each other. We would sometimes go to each other's room. We would sometimes kick it, but we weren't like close. So, it's like the gay community is very iffy. Like, sometimes we're close. Sometimes we're not. It's not no beef. It's just we don't be around each other like that.

Steven Jones
So, what does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging on campus?

Student D
Nothing. Not since I have been there. I mean, the only LGBT-related event we had was the Zetas and Sigmas. They held a speed dating game. They had an LGBT section, but it was only for girls. That didn't have a LGBT boy section. I didn't even go because I knew what it was gonna be. I stayed in my room. But that's the only LGBT event we had on my campus. Now, there's some of my friends, who are LGBT, are trying to start a club. But other than that, we've never had an LGBT event that I know of.

Steven Jones
So, what is the ideal HBCU experience, and does your chosen HBCU meet the qualifications?

Student D
Does not. But my ideal experience would be, I can put it, best explained, and as a mixture of grownish and a different world. The thing that I love about Valley, its family based. Once you meet your friends, them your friends, them your ride or die people.

But at the same time, it's so small. You have no choice but to sometimes butt heads with people. When you are just trying to take a break from your friends, you don't have nothing to do and nowhere to go, and you stuck in your room. If you don't have friends at Valley, and you are a loner, you're gonna hate it.

And my experience, my ideal experience would be somewhere where I could go to places and actually have something to do. Like, I'm not saying you need the biggest arcade in the world or bowling, but give me something. Like, even on campus, we don't have many events, and I'm like, y'all know this, and y'all wonder why people leave, it's because there's nothing to do. Especially, if you are a person who doesn't get along with people well. Or say you have bad anxiety and you're not good with meeting people, host an event. Throw it out. Because sometimes people don't automatically merge with their roommates. So, they need a place for that. Like, I want somewhere where I can feel, where I can reach out to different people. I actually, I want to feel like I'm, what's the word I'm looking for? I'm actually mixing and mingling with people. I want to know I'm
gonna have a connect or contact somewhere once I go out. I want to know that I'm reaching out to a person that's not just like me. I can learn something from them. We ain't from the same hood. It's like that would be my ideal experience.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. So what LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus, and what LGBTQ resources, if any, would you recommend establishing or implementing and why? And when I talk about resources, I'm talking about Gay Straight Alliances, LGBTQ resource centers, safe spaces, things of that nature.

**Student D**
Um, we actually, the weird part about it is, from what I've heard from other students, they had a Gay Straight Alliance, but it's disbanded. Because I guess no one took over. But we don't have resources for LGBT students. Like, it's basically, you just a student, but you're gay, but I mean, hey, go to the straight events, it's alright. It's not really anything there to help, like I said, that's why I said my friends are trying to build a club now and they are naming it "H.U.E." Hear Us Equally. And they were planning on coming out with it that. One of the girls in my school who actually held a heavy leadership program, and she's actually an AKA (Alpha Kappa Alpha). And she's a LGBT member. She wanted me to start this club. I can't exactly remember the name of it right now, but it's like this national club and it was started because black LGBT students were attacked on their campuses. And around all campuses, they started creating this club and they all connect to make goals to go to meetings and things like that. She wanted me to establish that on campus because, at this point on my campus, I'm probably the most flamboyant gay boy there, and I'm just the one that you could just easily point out, I guess. So, she wanted me to take over. Plus, I'm not scared to speak. I'm not scared to defend myself. And it was like, I feel like I would be good to take over it. So, I'm still considering doing that since it's not one. And instead of just complaining about change, why not be the change?

**Steven Jones**
There you go. Okay.

So, thinking back to when you first decided to attend Valley, and given your lived experiences on campus as a LGBTQ student, did you make the right choice to attend Mississippi Valley State University?

**Student D**
Um, heart wise, yes. I went through things at Valley that I wouldn't have experienced other places.

I will say this. This is my best way of convincing anybody to come to Valley. Valley teaches you the real world. When I say, Valley will teach you about when you have your first apartment and the fact that all the utilities may not work. It teaches you that. Valley also teaches you...can you still here me?
Steven Jones
Yeah, you were chopping up right there at the end just a little bit, when you were talking about the apartment, but I think I was able to understand what you were saying.

Student D
Okay, Valley teaches you about your first apartment, the fact that all your utilities may not work. Valley teaches you the point that, you may go somewhere and the food may not be to good but you deal with it. Valley teaches you that you're not the only person who goes through a struggle. You're gonna find somebody who else goes through that struggle. The struggle is a little bit more fun when you have people to go through it with. Like, Valley basically teaches you all the beginning stages that you need to know. And I wouldn't have learned that anywhere else. Had I went to Mississippi State, where you have a TV already in the room, a refrigerated given to you, and everything is so high class. I would have expected that somewhere in the real world, and it's not that. And it's sad that, as a HBCU, they don't have the funding to be this big illustrious school, but in all honesty, I tell anybody, this is how we are in the real world. Because if you are not lucky enough to get a job when you first get out, you gonna walk in your apartment, it ain't going to be a TV there. It ain't gonna be a refrigerator there. You are gonna have to learn that sometimes your air ain't going to work, so you gonna have to go get you a box fan from Dollar General. You just gonna have to manage how you do. So, I mean, it has taught me character, I can say that. Would I have loved to go somewhere else, of course. But knowing that the struggle is molding me to be somebody better, I can accept it.

Steven Jones
So, describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students at your institution. You kind of mentioned a little bit about that earlier in our conversation, but can you expound on that a little bit for me?

Student D
Um, on a scale of one to ten, I'll give them, maybe I go six, over halfway, because I don't really talk to everyone from school, at least not teacher-wise. But from all staff members I've met, they've all treated me just the same. I have met one LGBT staff member. That's like my road dog. Even though she is a staff member, we can talk about anything. She's like the auntie that I always wanted. She is always there for me. Anybody else that I've met, they always welcome me with open arms. They speak to me about my life. They actually care. They want to hear about what's going on. They want to make sure I'm safe. Make sure I'm okay. If they catch anybody even slightly thinking that they want to say something about me, they are attacking them right off the bat. Um, even with the straight teachers, straight staff members, they all have my back when it comes down to it. I haven't ran into any homophobic staff members. I haven't ran into any staff members that attack me for being gay or just didn't like me. It was always a good vibe for me with that.
Steven Jones
Awesome. Awesome. That's awesome. So how successful is your institution in communicating available LGBTQ resources to LGBTQ students? I know you mentioned there aren't any. So, they don't communicate that at all?

Student D
No, they don't talk about it. Like, it's basically, you would think we were ghost. But it's just not addressed. And the reason why I feel like it's not, is because, because I was talking about my mom too it, because anything that I do that is LGBT-related, my mom is always skeptical, because once again like I said, they always want me to be safe. And they have this weird thing that they think everything that goes on is going to have this terrorist-type of attack coming after it. And they always feel like people are going to attack me or something, I guess. So, like say if I go to a LGBT event, it's Student D be safe. Student D watch your surroundings, and I understand why, and I understand that, but it's just like, you know, don't, don't limit me.

So, even when I wanted to do this interview, she was just like, "Is it gonna be like, you know, out there? Are people gonna be looking at it?" I'm like, "mom, calm down. I got it. I'm good." And she feels like, you know, why should you need all of these gay spaces? She's like, "aren't you all just students too?" And I'm like, what you don't understand is, "saying that, is the same way of white people not understanding, white people are privilege. Straight people don't understand that they have this privilege to automatically feel normal and okay.

And I have yet to get to the point to explain myself to staff members, because there's never been a point to where I just feel like it was time to just do it. Because I'm a person, I like to do things when I feel like it's right, and when the energy is right, and it feels good to do it. And I always try my best to come at it from a good place, because even though I speak well, I naturally come off aggressive on somethings; especially when I'm passionate about something, and if sound like I'm barking at you, but I'm really just passionate and I want you to understand. I'm starting to understand now that just straight privilege is stuck in their head, and they don't understand that, even though we are still students, we need something because, kid you not, my experience at school, even though staff members are cool, and some of the students are, it's not always like that, because I haven't had anybody bully me, of course, had I had, I probably would have been kicked off campus by now.

But it's like, I can walk into my dorm room, because I stay in the upperclassmen dorm, our honor scholar's dorm, where all the athletes and everybody else stay. Which you would think would be a dream for a little gay boy like me, but it's not. But I love it only because I get my own bathroom. Um, the thing is, I can walk in. Nobody will speak. Like, they will see other boys walking in. What's up, bro? What's up, this? I walk in. They cut their eyes and uh. And they see me. Cuz they will cut their eyes and keep watching TV. And, I'm like, what did I do to y'all? I could hold the door open because we're coming up the stairs at the same time, and I know you're gonna come on my hall,
just like I've seen them come on the hall before. I'll open up the door. No thank you. They just running in. Never again. Won't be doing it again.

In my dorm, I actually got close with the man over it. The RD, and I got cool with the man that watches it at night. They never treated me differently. They always talk to me. I was cool with the RAs. I never did anything wrong. And plus, since I was the designated gay boy in the dorm, they knew I wasn't going to do nothing with girls, so they would always be like, you can gone and go up with your company. We know nothing is going to happen, so you can gone up with your homegirls and stuff like that. So, like sometimes the boys would get mad because I certain special privileges. But it's like, if you sneaking the girl in and I'm not and I'm chilling in my room, they'll be more likely, you know, to just do it. And those boys would be like, you would really think, like did something to them. Because I could speak, I be like, "Hey y'all." Won't nobody say a word. If I am sitting down there. Say I'm playing spades with the other boys. That I was actually cool with. Because I had gotten close with a few boys who were straight and we will have regular conversations, they were like dope people, they'll come down there and speak to everybody at the table but me. And I'm like, "y'all bugging. Because just because I'm gay don't mean I automatically like you."

And it was even worse, like, we would have hall meetings, and the RD and the man who watch the dorm at night, they would always be looking at me to make sure I'm alright because I have anxiety, but it's not a bad anxiety. It's like it's just something that like builds up only when I'm around all boys or something like that. And it's only my friends who notice it.

**Student D**

I'm always really ducked off. Usually, I'm in the front of everything, or I'm always in the middle. If it's all boys, I'm on the wall or I'm sitting on the couch. I don't want nobody to think I'm trying to be up on them. I'm trying to keep down confusion. It's like my defense mechanism as a gay boy. Like, I feel like every gay male has a defense mechanism. Like, we know how to survive in straight spaces. So, it is what it is.

**Steven Jones**

So, with that being said, if you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why?

**Student D**

I would say. It's going to sound weird using this word. I'm going to say, cringing.

And the only reason I am going to say, cringing, is because every moment, you never know what's gonna go on. And I don't like being surprised a lot. So, I am going to say my experience is cringing because I never know if it's gonna be a good day, if something irritating is gonna happen, if I'm going to run into an idiot who feels like they want to say something to me. If I'm gonna walk past a group of boys and they want to laugh at me
and say something slick, if I'm gonna meet some new friends, if I'm gonna walk past and people be like, oh Student D, come turn up with us, you never know.

Steven Jones
Okay, so cringing?

Student D
Yes.

Steven Jones
How do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus?

Student D
That would be great actually. It's great when you can identify with the person. It's one thing to be in a room with a male teacher. One, you very rarely have male teachers in a classroom. So, it's one thing to have a male teacher, and for him to be talking with all the straight boys, and it's always, you know, football, sports, this and that. Or, I had a teacher, anytime he be speaking like girls. I mean, boys if you get a wife, or boys when you got a girlfriend. And I'm like, you kind of. You got to be careful when you say things like that because you do have LGBT students, and you never remix it or you never fix it to the point where I feel comfortable. Which I'm not saying single me out for everything. I'm not saying you have to make everything specially organized for me, but it would just be nice to be thought of from time to time. And it would be great if I seen somebody who was like me who I don't have to walk on eggshells with because I don't know your thoughts. And I get so sick and tired of running into people that, "I'm Christian. I don't agree with what you do, but I'm not gonna you know disrespect you as a person." But at the same time, you're still basically telling me you don't like me. And at the same time, you're basically telling me that I can't honestly approach you and talk to you about certain thing. So, it's like, it makes it difficult, but we had LGBT staff members more, I would have more people that I can go to. I would have more staff members that I would feel comfortable asking for a letter of recommendation. I would have more staff members that I feel comfortable being with alone, because it's times where you want to go to a teacher's room; especially if it's a heterosexual male, and it's like sometimes they don't want to even hand you your paper because they scared of the fact that you might touch their hand. It's like, dude, come on.

Steven Jones
Wow.

What does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

Student D
A diverse campus would be something where, well, somewhere where you have people who understand that all mindsets are not the same. Where I could go to a party on campus and not hear the same trap songs time and time and time again. Don't get me wrong, I
love every HBCU anthem. I love the HBCU experience, but do we have to be so hood, ghetto, and ready to fight for every song? No.

**Student D**

I ain't saying you have to play Katie Perry and Britney Spears throughout the party, I didn't say all that. But I would want to sing or slow dance, something, like it's just, I want a vibe. I'm a vibey person. I live for a good simple connection, and you don't get a connection if all of us are bouncing around in a circle, hot and sweaty, talking about we ready to knuck if you buck. I'm sorry.

**Student D**

And it's like, true enough, I'm that person, I'm other people too, and a diverse campus for me would be a place where I know, okay, on Tuesday night, you will have the musical people meeting. Where we can meet up and watch rent, or meet up and watch the dream girls. Sing our hearts out and understand it. I got a group of people that we look at different art forms and understand them. A day where dancing is something. You know, something where people feel comfortable opening up their different facets of life, because a new term that I learned, it's not new, but it's new for me, it's like guilty pleasure.

Everybody on campus has a guilty pleasure. Like, I can be in a car with my straight homeboys. They will be like, "You are the only person that I know I can listen to this around and you better not say nothing to nobody," and Beyonce come blasting through the speakers. It's like, dude, why do y'all have to feel uncomfortable for that? That doesn't make sense? Or mainly Caucasian music, where my homegirls like "Don't you tell nobody I'm listening to this like," and Katy Perry play. I'm like, y'all, I figured y'all was going to tell me some real-life stuff and y'all playing. Like, this stuff I jam to all the time, and when people come in my room, you will automatically feel welcome. Like, I bought a vinyl disc record player. Basically, anybody that walks in my room, falls in love with it. I have Adele, Lana Del Rey, Billy Eilish. And it's like they be, oh my gosh, you got that. You only person I can listen to this with. And that's sad. On a campus full of people, I am the only person on campus that listen to Billy Eilish.

**Steven Jones**

Wow.

**Student D**

And that's even with staff members. Because they are another breed. Since some of them are older, I love older music. I can give you any Chaka Kahn, Aretha Franklin, Patti LaBelle, anything. And even for the Eda James of the world and give you that. And people be so shocked, and be like, oh my God, you know this. And I can't find nobody else that can relate to this. So that's what diversity would look like to me. Where you don't have to be afraid of your guilty pleasures.
Steven Jones
Okay, so everything that we've talked about tonight, everything that you've mentioned, every question that you've answered, every thought that you've had as a result of the question that I posed to you, thinking back on all of that, thinking back on the campus environment, thinking back on the housing situation, thinking back on the failure to provide a diverse and inclusive curriculum, right. Would you recommend your HBCU to other prospective LGBTQ students? Why or why not? If I was a LGBTQ senior in high school, and I was looking to attend college in a few months would you recommend Valley to me? Why or why not?

Student D
I would first have to understand the type of person you are. Generally speaking, I can't just recommend Valley to everybody because I won't lie, Valley is an acquired taste. You are going to either love it, or hate it, ain't no in between.

And even though I say, yeah, I love it, and I have these things I dislike about it. Can't nobody argue with me about Valley. Can't nobody do it. So, it's, like, either you love it or hate it. It's an acquired taste. You have to be able to take the punches and be able to make something out of those punches. Valley is a perfect example of having a sand castle and having somebody kick it over every time. Because just when you think you having good fun at Valley, they are going to always do something that make you irritated, but you have to love it, which is sad. So, I would have to know the type of person, like are you a strong person? Are you a person who is shy? Are you a person who is outgoing? A shy person, huh, no, I would not recommend that you come to Valley. A shy person, anybody who don't want to be seen, stuff like that, you can't come to Valley for one reason, those people are going to bother you. I ain't going to lie, Valley is high school all over again, but it's for grown people.

If you shy, you can go to a party, those people are going to make you dance. If you are standing around, because like I said, we in Mississippi, we are a jigging state. That's what we do. We dance. Call yourself sitting down at a party, they will scream over the mic, "If you see somebody standing, snatch them in the line." They don't care who you are. They going to grab you by your neck and you going to get in this line and dance, and they don't care how mad you get about it. If you walking around campus, somebody might start checking you but don't take it to heart. It's not meant to be harsh. But in Mississippi, we also known for checking. The thing about it, I'm a gay boy. We invented the read. Our mouths are vicious. If you were pick on as a child, or you had to defend yourself, your mouth is reckless as is. Then, I'm from Mississippi where we had to check. Then my brother was one of the best roasters in his class, and my sister too. My mouth is vicious. So, when I argue with people, they can't handle it. I don't even have to fight no more. I will hurt your feelings with my mouth. I don't even have to curse you out because my vocabulary is to extension it's irritating.

So, if you want to be shy, if you going to be weak, if you can't handle the hard times, if you are boogie, you can't do it. You just can't come. Because you're not gonna appreciate
it. You're gonna be ready to go the first day you get there when you twist on the knob and your doorknob is a little wiggly and shaky, you are going to be irritated. But if you're a person, you're outgoing, you make the best out of life, you see the best out of life, you can make, and you can survive and you understand and you can love it from your own point of view. Everybody who went to Valley has a story about how Valley has pissed them off one way or another, but who doesn't? Every school has its downfalls. Valley is just a little bit more public with there’s because we ghetto.

But in those people, I can show you so many people. Valley may not have a lot of people who have celebrity status, but we don't have dummies coming out of our school. We don't have people who can't make it out there in their field. And we don't have people who are going to crumble at the first time something happen, because at Valley, you are already going to go through somethings. Once you feel that and go through it, you are going to be alright.

I have had only one thing at Valley to irk me to the point where I almost left. I participated in the AKA pageant. Every fraternity and sorority have a pageant for somebody to be over their fraternity or sorority. And of course, the girls have boys who run, and the boys have girls to run. AKA is my favorite sorority. I love Alpha Kappa Alpha. I love pink and green. If I was a girl, that's what I would be a part of. I love them. They're pretty, they're nice. They're the people I kick it with from time to time. Um, they actually came to me and wanted me to be a part of their pageant. I said, okay.

Pageants, and stuff like that, I am made for that. I'm a pritzy sweet boy. I am. I like to dress up. I like to get fly. Whether it's a suit; whether it's urban; whether it's anything; I'm a fashionista. It's what I do. I love to speak. I love the talk. I love the voice my opinion on things. I love to dance. I love to show you art. That's just who I am.

So, when it came down to the pageant, it ended up being like four boys participating. And when we did it, we had to do a talent. We had to do. We had to answer a question at the end. We had a group dance at the beginning. It was something else we had to do. The first portion was swimsuit wear. I'm a thicker boy, so I don't too much like swimwear and stuff like that, so I make it do what it do. For me being thick, I know I have to care myself even better than most people do. And like I'm not heavy heavy but I'm a thicker boy. I had on this pink mesh see through shirt, and I had on these short light green swim trunks and some shades. And I had went and bought new clothes for all of this stuff. I had these holographic slides on. Next, we had to do our talent portion. We could dress in anything. I wore these plaid slacks with this gray turtle neck and some boots. After that we did something else. Everybody in the crowd was screaming my name. Even though people were there to support the other boys were rooting for me. Anything I did, I slayed. I also write poetry. I can freestyle poetry off the top of my head so easily, and I do it so fluidly. And I freestyle a poem basically about black excellence. And I even surprised myself with it, because I just knew I was going to slip up, but I didn't. And I actually came up with it right there on the spot. So, I did that and everyone went crazy.
teacher, I told you about, the LGBT staff member, the woman that I'm really close with, she was out in the crowd. My homegirls and boys was there. And we got to the last part, and they asked us a question like, "what do you feel is the biggest problem that our generation faces today?" I had in my mind that I was gonna say mental health because I don't too much battle mental health, but I count depression as mental health, and I went through that at an early age, um, battling my sexuality. Not knowing whether I was going to hell or not. Not knowing whether I was okay, you know, okay. Was I normal, etcetera, the other boys really didn't speak well, and it's not like me lying or anything, they just didn't speak well. It was one, the boy that did win, I will admit and say that since I did lose, I would have wanted him to win because I felt like he was the second best. I did my question and said the biggest thing we go through is discrimination. Because everyone in some way form or fashion is discriminated against. Black people get discriminated against. White people, white people who have done nothing to black people, but since racism is such a heavy topic these days, white people get discriminated against by black people in an all-black place, where most of the time in a HBCU, you don't too much see people getting picked on, but best believe we side-eyeing you. Indian people getting picked on. Everyone suffers discrimination. And I said that like as a black gay male, in the black community, we're faggots; in the white community, we're niggers; and to everybody else, we're unwanted.

And it's one thing for black men to be like, no one loves us, no one defends us, we're built to be strong; but you all kick us down and we are also black men, but just because we are gay, we have to be even stronger than you all. And for us to have to go through so much, I don't understand why everybody think gay black people are weak.

So, I said that in my response and everybody was clapping. Everybody was saying I had it in the bag but that intuition came again, and I knew I was going to lose. And I knew what it was before I did. If a boy wins Mr. Pink Ice, they usually run for Alpha. They usually try to pledge Alpha. Gay boys have won Mr. Pink Ice before, but like I was telling my friend, this is a whole different ball game. Like this is a new group of people. This ain't the people from back when who might not have cared. And you would think as you get closer and closer down the generations, gay people would get accepted more, but it's really not like that. It's not the outlook that we think it is. We really think we are progressing but we are not. Like look at we still have black people dying in the streets but we thought we were progressing as a people. I said that and stood there and waited.

The boy who beat me, his talent was, he can draw really well. The boy is really talented. I know him really well. He is cool. He sketched his stuff though. He already had it sketched out and he sketched it again in front of the people. That was basically his talent. Another boy did a poem that he read off his phone. Another boy performed because he was in the band. He is a drummer. I knew something was up. It irritated me that, as a gay black male, you are not taken seriously because of who you are having sex with. Like, that's none of your business, and shouldn't affect what I can do. And the fact that I know I'm talented, and I know I'm educated, and I know I can carry myself well, and the fact that no one would give me shot because of that, irks me.
And when I did it, I put on this fake smile. My mom and dad were in the crowd. And as much as my mom and dad don't like me being gay, I'm their baby. I'm the baby boy. And I seen the hurt on their face. They got up and they left. They texted my phone and said they would be in the car waiting. I saw their message when I got off the stage. The staff member I was telling you about walked up to me first and said, "I see it in your face and I'm going to tell you this, come to my office tomorrow because we got talk about this, but you did a great job. You did an amazing job. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. I'm so proud of you," and she left.

But it showed me something, and it awoken me that, even though girls may understand that there are safe havens for gay boys, you really don't appreciate it. And it's like where are nice, we are cool to be purses for your amusement, or we're okay to be around. We can pick out your outfit. Look at boys, so and so. I can be your lover and secretary. I can be everything your boyfriend won't, and everything your girlfriend can't, but you still don't see me. And it's like, straight girls are so scared to tell their homegirls their tea, thinking that their homegirl is going to have one up on them, so you run and tell us your business. But we can't tell you ours, because we know you're gonna run and tell that same homegirl, that you don't want to know yours, you going to tell them ours.

And with your boyfriend, everything your boyfriend can't be, you want us to be. You want us to be your gay homeboy who can pick out your clothes, but you also want us to be your boyfriend that can change your tire, and it's not that. That being said, after I went through seeing all of that with them, I left. I grabbed all my stuff, I went to the room and changed because it was a party that same night.

It was like a movie. The boy, they came in order, the boy who was in fourth place walked in, he said, Student D, you know you supposed to have won bro, but I'm proud of you. You are who you are, you pushed yourself. We all know why you didn't win. Keep your head up. I told him thanks for telling me that, because it at least confirm to me that something is going on with this and I'm not crazy.

My mom, she would never lie. She will never sugarcoat nothing for me or my siblings. She was like, Student D, baby you know you were supposed to have won that, and you know why you didn't win. But like I told you, if you were going choose this life, it's gonna be hard. And it's going to come with battles, and it's going to come with struggles, but if you going to live it, you going to have to have tough skin.

And I never used to understand it as a childhood, because I used to try to ask my mom like, why do I have to have tough skin; instead of, telling everybody not to be assholes to people who don't deserve it. But I understood that you can't change everybody, especially not with a system that's built to teach people how to hate. So, she taught me, she was like, Student D, you were meant to win. Maybe things are going wrong right now, maybe you're losing stuff, but understand those loses are teachable moments. She was like, just
because you losing the now, use this as motivation to win later. My dad didn't say
nothing, because my dad is not a very emotional person.

My dad waited until he got home. He sent me this lengthy message. He was like, you
know that shit was wrong, the fact that you didn't win, but you did great. I'm so proud of
you. No matter what we go through, you did what you were supposed to do. I looked at it.
I hate crying. And I started bawling. Because my dad never does stuff like that often. The
fact that I knew I did what I suppose to have done, like my dad, we can have our
arguments, but that man going to be at everything. And he is going to be there to cheer
me on. That's my child, that's my son, walking up there getting honor roll. Yep, that's
him. And that's what it was. Like I said, that was probably the one experience that almost
made me want to leave Valley. Because I was so done. But, I mean, I got over it, and my
friends helped me get over it.

Steven Jones
So, with that being said, and considering your response, what can Valley do, if anything,
to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students?

Student D
They can open their eyes and realize that we exist, for one. It starts with
acknowledgment. It starts with saying, okay, we have LGBT students here. We're not
gonna allow you to walk around and bully them. We're not gonna allow you to walk
around, just because we feel comfortable with wearing a crop top, meaning that it should
be acceptable for everybody to sit there and laugh and through jokes. Which I'm not
saying it's not gonna happen because, like I say, it's a part of that roasting experience. But
when it gets to a point where it is downright discrimination, say something.Um,
acknowledge us to the fact that when we are in the classroom, true enough, the norm is
heteronormative statements, but we are there. Take some time to include us, and to listen.

Student D
Come up with events, that even though it's a few of us, we are gay, we also have allies
who also enjoy those events. The people who don't understand gay people, teach them.
Because I've had so many people on campus not understand me, and just be like, oh
Student D, explain it to me. They may say, how did you know you were gay, etcetera.
But I feel comfortable knowing that, you at least feel comfortable with me explaining it
to you, and you want to know. They can start by acknowledging us. Start hosting events
where you're explaining to people that gay people are a part of history as well. Because
when we talk about black history at our school, with being a HBCU. Yeah, we are going
to talk about the black people, but do y'all not know that the black gay people really were
a part of it. Like, Martin Luther King's right-hand man was a homosexual male, and his
story has never been told. And none of my teachers have ever let that be known. And it's
like, everybody thinks, oh, if you're gonna be a leader for the black people, you have to
be straight. You have to be masculine. You have to be this, and when I say, talking
masculinity at a HBCU is working my last nerve man. Start by understanding that this
stuff has to go. Like, just because you're a boy, don't mean you got to play football,
baseball, kick rocks and kiss every girl. That's not what this is. Like, accept us. And even if you don't accept what we do, accept us as people. Like, don't just look over us. And if you're gonna have people come to the school to speak, can we at least get a homosexual speaker for once or twice out of the year. Can we get somebody who is an inspiration to us? Like, that's all I ask for.

Steven Jones
Well, to follow up that question, what steps do your institution take to ensure campus safety for all students?

Student D
I mean, the police are nice or whatever. If you have issues, you can basically go and talk to them. The Chief of Police, he's really cool. And like, he's one of the biggest macho men. And he's a man of Omega Psi Phi, and that's self-explanatory for itself. He's so cool, and I talk to him all the time. He makes sure I'm okay. Like, he be like, You good? You not having any issues? You're fine? Nobody bothering you? I'm like, I'm good. As long as they continue to do that, it will be alright.

I mean, nothing has really just ever happened to where we just had a homophobic attack while I have been there. So, I have yet to really just see what they'll do. And they haven't really spoke on it much. I would hope, from what I have seen, I feel like we'll be okay.

Steven Jones
So, my last question, you kind of just answered it. Have you ever witnessed or been a victim to homophobic acts on campus? If so, tell me about it.

Student D
I mean. Not major homophobic things. I will have little sly events happen. Like if I'm walking past a group of boys, them saying little sly stuff. I've had to spazz out on a few people. Like, I was in the cafe and I was walking through where these group of boys was like, um, there goes that faggot boy. He was like, that's your boyfriend, right? He was messing with one of his homeboys. And I basically turned around and was like, "that's your mammy and your baldhead mouth grandmammy, and don't talk to me." I said, "I don't know y'all. I don't want to know y'all. I don't want to participate in anything y'all have going on," and I said, we're not friends. I don't want to get to know y'all. Y'all not cute and y'all not attractive. My homegirls wouldn't talk to y'all, so neither would I." I turned around and walked off. Everybody started laughing.

And so those little moments like that, are the things that I very rarely come across. I dislike boys that say sly things, but then knowing my mouth, and knowing that I'm not scared to go in with them, I don't care how many of you there are. Because I have siblings and it's nothing to call them. But at the same time, you're not gonna pick on. So, I have those little moments, but I've never had nobody approached me like, you gay; you need to move; you need to get out of my way; you need to get out my seat. I've had situations where, it was one situation in class, where I didn't even know the boy had did
something to me, but my friends caught it. It was basically like; the boy had passed out the papers for the teacher. He passed out everybody else paper, but he threw my paper at me. But I didn't notice it because I was in my bag looking for something, but my friends, sitting beside me did. They spazzed out. They were like why are you throwing his paper him. The boy didn't do anything to you. Just because he gay, does that doesn't have anything to do with you. I told them to calm down before the teacher kick them out of the classroom. I asked him, is there a problem you want to address? And he was like, nah, bruh, I don't have no problem with you. I was like, okay then, y'all let him go on about his business. So apparently, he didn't have anything to address, so it didn't matter.

Steven Jones
Well, Student D, man. All I can tell you is, uh, you have an amazing spirit brother.

Student D
Thank you.

Steven Jones
And you're going to do some great things in life. I can see it. I can feel it. As a higher ed administrator myself, you know, I come across a lot of students, and all types of students. And, you know, you really need to be that inspiration, that person that go and encourage other students to live in their truth and just be them. Because somebody needs to hear your story, somebody needs to hear someone else, tell them that. And I've interviewed a good bit of students already, and this has been a really good interview for me. Because you've been authentic, and that's what I need. That's what research is all about is, is being authentic, being truthful and calling a spade a spade, and you've done that today, so I greatly appreciate you participating in my study. So, I do once again, appreciate your time.

Student D
No problem.

Steven Jones
Is there anything else you would like to add?

Student D
Um, no. That's it. That's everything.

Steven Jones
Alright. Well, thank you again, if you think of anything that you would like to add, just let me know. Okay.

Student D
Okay, thank you.
Steven Jones
Have a good one.

Student D
You too.
Steven Jones
Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to be with me on a Sunday afternoon. I do appreciate that.

Student E
No problem.

Steven Jones
You are 18 years of age or older, correct?

Student E
That's correct.

Steven Jones
Okay, you are a student at Jackson State University. Is that correct?

Student E
That's correct.

Steven Jones
And you do self-identify as LGBTQ students there?

Student E
Yes, I do.

Steven Jones
Okay, so we'll start off the interview with you giving us a little bit of information about you. You can tell me as much as you like. Try to stay away from any self-identifying things. But of course, if you say anything that would self-identify you, I will redact that information so that no one will see it. So, let's start there. Tell me a little bit about you, your background and how you got to Jackson State University.

Student E
Okay. I'll start by saying, my name is Student E. I am 33 years old. I was born in Jackson, Mississippi. My mom and father both work in education, and I grew up pretty much around them at their jobs. So quite naturally, after high school, continuing education was a goal for me. I got to Jackson State initially in 2010. After going to another school prior to that, and I got to Jackson State with the hunger to just explore music. So, I got into the band, and that's really what made me go to Jackson State. I'm pretty sure a lot of people
say that, but I want to be in the band because that's all I knew growing up and my high school band director inspired me. So, I got in the band and I enjoyed it man. I really got a lot done as far as music experience. And sad to say, you know, my grades weren't perfect. So, I ended up sitting out a year or two. And during that year or two of me being out, I was lucky enough to join the workforce in the education system here in Jackson. I began working for an elementary school and it just inspired me to go back to school. But when I went back to school, I didn't get into the band. I just tried to continue my education from the normal education route without any extracurricular activities. During that time, I found myself getting agitated with my lifestyle because I wasn't happy. I wasn't fulfilling myself mentally, physically. Um, because during that time I was trying to make myself available to people, I guess I could say. People that meant something to me. I wanted to be free, you know, and not have to hide who I was and hide anything that had to do with me and my sexuality. So, when I got to Jackson State, I did that. I hide myself because I was afraid of being cast out. I was afraid of being talked about and that was kind of one of the reasons why, you know, I didn't continue my education in the normal four-year path. I had to take some breaks. I had mental breakdowns. I had, um, family issues. So, once I joined the workforce in education, I made myself available to the people that I worked with, and they were so supportive. They encouraged me, inspired me, and gave me you know, epiphany and brand-new ideas that I did belong in the education world. And aside from music, you know, I was inspiring little kids. So that's kind of the reason why I'm still continuing education. That's the reason why I'm back at Jackson State. During these last few years, I will say, starting with 2015, I joined a collegiate-inspired dance group, but I like to say organization because it's something I do in my free time. I hip hop dance. I train with body movement and kind of help the community kids who want to do the same thing. So that inspired me, and once I began to indulge in it, I started taking classes and going to camps. It was all centered around Jackson State because I would meet people that were interested in, I guess, joining the organization that I was a part of, and they were taking notice to like, the videos and content we would post. School began to be a lot more comfortable, because I found an outlet that allowed me to be who I was, allow me to go into an environment where I wasn't judge, or at least I didn't feel like I was cast out or to feel ashamed. So, my grades began to get better and going to Jackson State these last few years, I can say I really have seen college from a different perspective than I did when I first went. So, the last few years of me, indulging in dance and indulging in education, my grades have really come up. I maintain a 3.0 average. I have had the opportunity to work alongside some of the provost at Jackson State in my department. I can say, at least for this time, and I'm saying this time, as in me going to school and continuing my education. This time, I'm a lot more focused. I'm a lot more ambitious and geared in my studies. It's not like it was when I first left high school.

Steven Jones
Okay. Well, um, so what is your college major and your classification?
Student E
My classification is a junior. My college major is Interdisciplinary Studies with a focus in Human Resource Development.

Steven Jones
Gotcha.

So, tell me about your coming out story. How was the first time you actually said, okay, at this point in time, I want to be open and honest about my sexuality, and this may be the first person that I have this communication with, whether it's family or friends. Tell me about that.

Student E
In 2009, I was on break from a community college I was going to, and I worked part-time at a nightclub. And during these times, my family didn't know. My family didn't know for me. They were unsure and they didn't really have an idea of my sexuality or how I lived my life. I had been dancing, really since the beginning of high school, and they didn't know about it. They didn't know my lifestyle or some of the things that I like to do. So, I say 2009, I was leaving work, and I was on the phone. It was late at night, and I was on the phone with a friend and just having conversation, and my sibling, my oldest sibling. Um, he asked me a question. He said, why are you sitting outside at four o'clock in the morning with a guy?

Well, I'm having a conversation and we're just talking. I was like, why, what's wrong? He was like, man, I have told you about that gay shit. And I was like, huh, we never even spoke about, you know, any hypothetical or any suggestive, you know, things that could hint to my sexuality. So, I instantly felt like he put me in a category before we had a conversation about it. And so, we had a text argument for another minute or two, and the last thing he said to me was, "F-you, you're dead to me." And that was kind of the eye-opener. He was really bashing, but he don't understand. So, I kind of felt closed off at that point. I was like, well, I don't have to indulge with my family. But I did talk to my older brother about it. I have two older siblings. And I spoke with my older brother about it, and he mentioned it, you know. He was like, hey, it is what it is, but don't look for acceptance, not even from your own family. He said, because So, even though we have LGBTQ females in our family, he said they'll never treat you the same way. They'll never respect you the same way. And that sticks with me to this very day, believe it or not, um, I don't expect people to accept my decisions or the choices that I've made. But I do want to speak so, that part of my life, um, it made me a lot stronger in my sexuality. I felt like well, you know, here's one guy that I've always counted on, you know, I've always said to myself, he has my back no matter what. And truth be told, he still does to this day, but my family still don't accept my sexuality. They deal with it, and they, you know, it's kind of like, it is what it is with them. But from that day, that was an eye opener to me. I just I don't know what else to say because that's kind of where I'm at with that.
Steven Jones
So, how's your relationship with your parents in terms of your sexuality?

Student E
Um, our relationship is good. We talk every day. I still have, I still make contact with my dad. He lives in the same city. He actually lives like two blocks away and I leave with my mom currently. Um, so we have a great relationship. You know, they have overcome the, I guess, knowing. They've overcome, like, the finding out or the reality check of the situation. But I know what they want and what they desire.

Steven Jones
So, have you had an open conversation with your parents about how you feel about how the family perceives you and your sexuality? Has it ever gotten to be a serious conversation about what your position is and the fact that, this is who you are, and that won't change?

Student E
Hmm. My mom, yes, to some degree. Me and my mom have talked about it. We've discussed my sexuality and what I am in terms of LGBTQ. Um, I guess she wanted to know whether I was using protection or, you know, do I talk to a lot of guys. I assured her that, no, I do not talk to a lot of guys. I wanted to share that with her, I wanted to ease her mind and kind of like, educate her on what her son does. I let her know that, you know, I'm still the same person. I'm still, you know, your son, but whatever you're thinking in terms of sex and that whole entire lifestyle, you don't have to worry because I have met some great people along the way that have educated me and helped me. I have a friend that works in the healthcare field, and he educates me on condom protection, and protecting yourself, and using all the tools that you need if you're going to have sex. So, I shared that with her, and I think that really kind of took the weight off and kind of made her say, okay, well just make sure you know, you do what you got to do. Other than that, I haven't really spoke with anyone else in my family. My mom was the only one who inquired, and I think everybody else kind of goes off of what they see or what they hear. And when I say that, I mean, you know, if they see me with someone, they pretty much assume, oh, that's your, quote, unquote, friend. Because I get that a lot at family functions, at little get togethers, they will say, oh, is that your friend? And I have to say, no, not really, if you're thinking about that friend, no, this is just a friend. Ninety-nine percent of the time, that's all I ever you know, I don't ever bring anyone around my family that I'm dating because I feel like that's a big step.

Steven Jones
Okay, so let's talk for a minute about your religious affiliation. Being here in the south, you know, what is your religious affiliation and how is that perceived in terms of your sexuality?
Student E
Okay, so I was raised in a C.O.G.I.C. (Church of God and Christ), and I may be learned this a couple of years ago, my grandmother and grandfather helped start a church here in Jackson many years ago. My family and I grew up in the church. I started going to this church in my early years of life. I say, from ages two to about nine, and grew up in that church, which is C.O.G.I.C., and I really didn't have a clue then. So, from middle school to high school, my dad's side of the family, I have two older sisters and they introduced me to the Baptist church. That's where I got baptized. I spent a couple of years singing in the choir. After those two years or so, I went to high school, I indulge a little. I joined the So, Baptist church again, but now my religious views are more so spiritual. I'm more so a spiritual being. I do believe in God, but I believe in a higher power. More so, I don't go to Baptist church. I just read for education and knowledge. And, you know, I will find some videos maybe online that is geared towards my belief.

Steven Jones
So, in reference to the Baptist church, was that part of your driving force to make that decision? Was it because of maybe how things were perceived in the church or how you felt?

Student E
Absolutely.

When I say, going to church, made me. Now music, I can say made me want to go to church. I love music. I love gospel music. And I like to consider myself a musician. So, when I look at musicians in the church, and I listen to the things that they do, it moves me. So that's what drew me to the church, but after the music, after, you know, the introduction of the choir, and then the speaker speaks in his sermon, I shouldn't get offended. I got offended many times. I got offended. Even when I felt like they were talking to me, or sometimes even, you know, and this is just me being open and honest, I will see some people in church that I may identify, or that may identify to me as LGBT. And I can remember sitting in church and listening to the dialogue, and listening to the shift of conversation as the speaker talks about sexuality. Talks about bestiality, and marriage, and it just makes you feel uncomfortable. I guess maybe because there is no way for me to go to church and feel like you're supposed to talk about something else. I just feel like, it's odd that that's the topic when I come to church. It's odd that, um, even when I do hear that, yet, I hear them say, come as you are, or I hear them say, no sin is greater than the other. You know, and me listening to a coworker have a lecture playing on their computer out loud. It doesn't, it seems like it hasn't changed. It seems like it's actually gotten a little worse, where they're kind of casting people out on what they like to do, or casting people out on who they are. So that's one of the reasons why I just kind of, you know, step back on going to church. Going to a Baptist church or going somewhere where I feel uncomfortable. Because I don't like to feel like that. I'm not one to, you know, go to someone after service and say, hey, why did you say, you know, why did you speak on it? I'm not like that. I don't think that I could do that. But it just made me not want to go back.
Steven Jones
Okay. So, if you could change one or two things about your college experience, what would it be and why?

Student E
If I could change one or two things? I would change. I wouldn't have went to Texas when I left high school. I would have went to Jackson State. The reason why I say that, me going to Texas, I didn't have anyone out there I could talk to. That was a pivotal point in my life where I felt, hey, I really could talk to somebody while I'm out here. And I mean, talk to someone as in, find maybe a mentor or find someone who appear to have their head on straight.

Steven Jones
Yeah?

Student E
Yeah. My college experience, in 2006, I was a lot more lonely than I was after that. I was a lot more lonely because I know I left home because I felt like I had this big secret. I left home because I didn't want to be in my city anymore. I wanted to be around new people, but I did need someone there to talk to about my feelings and the way I felt. Because truth to be told, and I left that out, in ninth grade, you know, my aunt confronted me about my sexuality. Because there were conversations about me explaining to my family, when I did come out. They asked me, what made you want to come out? What made you like men? What’s the reason behind this? I share with them that I have a natural curiosity, but I was molested at the age of nine or maybe ten. I guess it was between third, fourth and fifth grade. And I tell them that it's not really, I'm not gonna say that it really deterred me away from females, but when I began to think about sex going into my teen years, that was a thought in my mind. That was a, it played over and over. You know, and I said to myself, well, I can't really not act on these feelings just because the world is saying, God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve. This is me telling myself like, you don't have to do what everyone else thinks you should do. And truth be told, I still tried it. I still, I dated a young lady, and we have sex, and I mean, it was enjoyable, but I still didn't feel any connection. And that was in ninth grade. So, me coming up after that I still got all of the teases and bashes that people get coming up as a young person. Oh, your voice kind of sounds feminine. Oh, you know. Oh, you kind of walk like a girl. Your butt is big like a girl. I remember all those little teases and comments. And all I remember saying to myself is, I didn't make this voice. You know? I didn't decide to walk like this or decided to shape my body this way. So, I kind of felt like people were, I don't know, prescribing me, or kind of just giving me what they think I am. So, after dating that young lady, and then going on through high school, and having these feelings and started to dance, behind closed doors or like dance with people that I knew I could trust, I wanted to leave and go to college somewhere else. And then I got out there, and it was like, well, I'm out here. Now I don't have anyone to talk to. I don't have someone to guide me or give me information as to what it is that I want to do. So, I would change that. I would have gone to Jackson State first, and then I would have kept my grades up.
Steven Jones
Okay. So, you mentioned that as a nine-year-old, you were molested. Was that a family member? Or was that someone off the street that you just didn't know?

Student E
It was a family member. It was my older cousin. What he would do was, he would say, like, I would go visit my aunt. He would say, do you want to go lay down. Me being like eight, nine or ten years old, I'm like, okay. When we would go lay down, we would watch TV, and he will kind of snuggle up on me. And it began to be a grinding thing, a hunching thing, and it escalated. Even at that point. I would say, I knew what he was doing, but he was older than me. And I know I couldn't say don't do that. I wasn't really sure at that age, whether he was supposed to do that or not. So, but I knew, you know, eventually that he was going to try to go for more, and he did. It went on from him saying lay down, and we would watch TV and he would grind on me. And then it escalated to him saying, well go in the bathroom and perform oral sex on me. And that just kept going, and kept going on for a while. And that escalated into him trying to insert his penis. And I, I couldn't do that. So, when he would make me lay on the floor, I would just tighten up my body. I would just lay there really stiff because that hurt. It was like, wait a minute man, what's going on. I wouldn't say that, but I was thinking that. And I just was stiffing up my body and it never went in, and he gave up, he eventually gave up. But what kind of sparked it, I think was when my aunt asked me, she was dropping me off in high school one morning, and she asked me, she said, what's going, is everything...this isn't ninth grade. I'm sorry, this is, I want to say maybe 2013, 2014. And she asked me, she said, what was going on? I know that in the past that you've had some experiences. She was like, do you want to tell me anything? I was like, XXXXX, that's her son's name. I said, XXXXX molested me, and she shook her head and said, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I was like, it's okay. I know that you didn't know, and a lot of times she wasn't home. She was a paralegal and was always working. She just kept apologizing. She said, she wished that I could have said something. I let her know that, you know, it's not. It's not easy for kids to talk, you know, kids don't develop the conversation, or the dialogue that we have is grownups to say, hey, your son trying to stick me. I didn't know how to communicate that to her. So, we moved passed it. You know, she is supportive, but the only person I can say that really has come to me and say, you know, let's talk about this is my mom. That's the person who has cared enough to listen to me, sit down and tell the ugly truth.

Steven Jones
So, with XXXXX, have you had an opportunity to face him since those times? How are things now, given that you are an adult? Do you guys interact?

Student E
Yes, we do. We haven't discussed it. Even since then, he is an older cousin, so I see him from time to time at family functions or whenever we have something over here at the house. He also has a lawn cutting business, so he comes and cuts the grass from time to time, so it's always been, hey cuz, hey cuz. Hey, how are you doing? Hey, how are you...
doing? And that's it. We've never sat down and discussed it. We've never sat down and address that issue. I've thought about it, but I don't know. I don't think I could bring myself to do that. Maybe I could, but I guess that's not really something on my list right now. I have forgiven him. I don't hate him for it. I wish he wouldn't have done it, but I don't know. I've went through it. I've cried about it. I've asked the universe. I've asked God, why me? Yeah. But I guess going through my religious faith and, you know, going to a Baptist church and going through this spiritual connection. That allowed me to forgive him. That allowed me to relieve myself of that burden that I was carrying. I feel better, but now, I guess, I can't really get over the thought process my family has. The ones that don't ask questions but sit back and assume. That's kind of where I am now. But as far as my cousin, XXXXX, I have forgiven him for.

Steven Jones
So, what is the campus environment like for you as a LGBTQ student at Jackson State University?

Student E
Ooh, the campus environment, to me, it is very hetero driven. I can see a lot of students walking around. And I mean, to me, it's hetero driven. I think everyone there is pretty much boy meets girl type of environment. They don't really, I don't really see a lot of communication with LGBT people. I don't think that there is a negligence there. I don't think that people don't like LGBT. It's just not pushed. There is no welcome or there's no diversity. So, for me, it's pretty much hetero driven.

Steven Jones
So, what does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging on campus?

Student E
They don't, they don't host anything that's LGBTQ driven. They don't send any emails. They don't make any post. They don't have any provosts that are LGBTQ marketers. They don't do anything, you know, as far as to my knowledge, that speaks on LGBTQ.

Steven Jones
Okay, so what is the ideal HBCU experience? And does your chosen HBCU meet those qualifications?

Student E
The idea HBCU experience is a school with organization. A school that ensures student graduation rates. And on top of that, they have support systems that cater to LGBTQ. They have mentors and provosts that are there to assist students with LGBTQ-needs and issues. Because I had a roommate when I first got to Jackson State, and they shared with me their personal information in regards to their sexuality, and they shared a lot more personal information with me. They had to go off campus to get that help. They had to go
away from campus to get those needs and speak to the people that they needed to help them with whatever it was. The campus does not provide that. And I know this because I had a vehicle and I took that person wherever they needed to go. But there were things on campus that, I feel like, you know. When students are allowed to leave their dormitories; well, when students leave their dormitories, they make choices to go with people off campus. They make you know, strangers come up and they are able to come talk to people. So, campus enforcement. You know, there were many nights that my friend, my roommate met someone off of a LGBT app. And they would leave with them, and you know, me being a roommate and a friend, that kind of made me worried. It was like, so if something happens, how does the campus respond? You know, what actions did they take to prevent something like that from happening? But to me, the ideal campus would have that type of assistance. That type of setup to where if someone needs something that's LGBTQ-related, whether it's advice, whether it's medicine for anything, the campus doesn't provide that.

Steven Jones
Right. You mentioned that you sometimes would have to take your roommate off campus to get things are you talking about in general things just necessities or was a medicine was it help was it counseling.

Student E
And this case, it was medicine. My roommate shared with me that he had became positive. And he needed to go to a local clean to get help. So, I drove him to the clinic, and he was able to get help. He spoke with someone about the situation. He spoke with someone about living with this situation, and even coming back to the dorm with a better sense of the choices that he can make going forward on it, and they gave him food, you know, the head of pantry so I really, you know, that spoke to me, and it does every day. And all I was saying to myself was, you know, what if they had been on campus or would have, um, like I said it would have campus enforcement was there to say, you know, who are you? Why are you driving on campus because I, I kind of look at they're like, well, even though those choices were made by both of those individuals, something could have been in the way to prevent that, you know, cuz all I'm saying to myself is. Before that person came, before that person drove up, before that person decided to drive on campus, you weren't positive. I mean, he's fine now, but I just feel like there could have been a preventive measure. Um, there could have been condom booths on campus. I mean, I'm sure university studies show that college students have sex. And I'm pretty sure that those numbers aren't low. So, a condom booth or having LGBT sex talk when you have your student orientation for freshmen, and real life having somebody sit up there and talk about those LGBTQ apps. Because students are downloading them. That wasn't taken, none of that was taken. So, I think about that, in terms of, saying that could have been an enforcement there. It could have been a strategy to allow students to make better choices, and me having to take him off campus to a clinic, I felt like that was pointless. I felt like it could have been a better way.
Steven Jones
Well, speaking of a clinic, what LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus, and what LGBTQ resources, if any, would you recommend establishing or implemented on your campus?

Student E
To my knowledge, there aren't any LGBTQ resources on campus. There aren't any LGBTQ tools. There aren't any on campus, that I know of, on campus. Maybe someone, so happen to find out or get to know them, but as far as the campus having anything, they don't. But what I would enforce would be like, they have a center for students who feel like they want to commit suicide, or students who are in an abusive relationship. They have centers for that, but they don't have centers for students who feel they are questioning their sexuality or questioning their identity. They don't have it.

Steven Jones
So, they don't have a LGBTQ Learning Resource Center?

Student E
No.

Steven Jones
No safe spaces?

Student E
No.

Steven Jones
No Gay Straight Alliance?

Student E
No.

Steven Jones
So, thinking back to when you first decided to attend an HBCU, and given your lived experiences on campus as a LGBTQ student, did you make the right choice to attend Jackson State University?

Student E
I made the right choice to attend Jackson State in regards to my education, but I do feel that Jackson State can improve. I do feel that Jackson State can add resources to help speak and help put a stop to some things going on on campus that don't really have to go on. I think JSU needs to tap into it, and maybe do like a forum that maybe will help give them an idea of the type of resources that they could use or that will be used on campus. Because now, in my opinion, when I was in the marching band, there weren't many LGBTQ students who are were out. There weren't many LGBTQ students who could
walk around and feel comfortable enough to tell you their sexuality face-to-face. Now, the things that I see on social media, and even some of the new younger students that I've come in contact with, they're LGBTQ, and they don't mind telling you. And they've shared with me that it's a different morale in the band program, and that it's a lot of LGBTQ students who are themselves and they don't have to really be ashamed. But I feel like that is only existing because the situation with bashing and hazing in a collegiate system has kind of been put to a stop. There have been a lot of things in regards to Jackson State anyway. Where people have had allegations for putting their hands on another student, that has kind of come to a stop, and I'm really glad about that. Because that was always a fear of mine. I felt that if I did come out in a collegiate system, or in an organization, that I will be cast out, bashed, even assaulted. So, for them to have that freedom to say that, that makes me happy. It makes me proud, because I wasn't one of those bandsmen that could walk around and say that.

Steven Jones
Well describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students at Jackson State.

Student E
I can't describe the support because no one really reach out. No one reached out in regards to, you know, saying that they will support or if need be. I will say that it was a lady that worked in the financial aid office, and I really can't say this for myself, but she helped my roommate, um, with, I guess, information in regards to getting grants. But that still doesn't say she helped him because she knew he was LGBTQ. I just felt that she sensed it. Or she felt that he really could use the information. And she took out the time more than others, in my opinion, to connect with him and contact him for that information. But on a on a large scale, JSU hasn't really reached out to support any LGBT kids and provide any type of help and resources.

Steven Jones
How successful is Jackson State in communicating their available LGBTQ resources? I know we kind of talked about that. And you kind of mentioned that they typically will not you know, they, they normally don't spread that type of information. There's no type of dissemination whatsoever. So, I guess, can you speak to that a little bit more in terms of how do you find out if there is a LGBTQ event on campus? Are there bulletin boards that they market this information on, or do they send out emails, mass text messages? How are they communicating it to the LGBTQ community?

Student E
They send out emails every day. I received emails from them around the clock but nothing ever has anything about LGBTQ in it. So, I'm, I'm reluctant to even think that they have anything like that that exist. And the reason I say that is because, I signed up to receive updates from JSU, even when I started back school, I signed up to receive updates because I didn't want to miss anything. Me being someone who's really trying to be involved. Because after going to school the first time, I lost confidence, and once I got back in school and got to Jackson State, and I didn't even do good. Well, I did good. I
didn't do my best, I would say. I didn't do my best. The first time at Jackson State, I gained my confidence to do it again and experience college from a different perspective without being in any extracurricular activities. I signed up for so many things to receive, like I didn't want to miss nothing. They don't have any type of alliance or any type of subgroup that is geared towards helping kids.

**Steven Jones**
So, if you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why?

**Student E**
If I can use one word? Can I use a two-word phrase?

**Steven Jones**
Go for it.

**Student E**
Eye-opening.

**Steven Jones**
Okay.

**Student E**
The reason I say eye-opening because, I guess I have a love for schooling. Like I say, my parents both work in the school system. So, I have a love for systematic education, whether it is to its best, or it needs some work. But to go through what I went through to come into a collegiate setting where I came from a district that cared. I came from a district that, even for the kids who were silent, who needed help, even for the kid who spoke a lot, and they needed help, they were there to help you. They were there to put resources out for you. Now granted, it wasn't LGBT, coming up from elementary, middle and high school but they put they put things in place for students to be helped and get the things that they needed in order to survive mentally.

JSU, not the case. The reason I say that is because I've been on campus so many times where I can't fathom the thought of how I would have been if I were out. The things I would have come in contact with, or the people I would have come in contact with. Because I've heard students go down the plaza, or the main walkway, and every now and then, you would see a LGBTQ student who maybe wear some type of LGBTQ paraphernalia. You may see an LGBTQ student dancing down the Tiger Walk, and you would hear a student yell out of their room, fag or sissy. Those days were when I first went to JSU back in the 2010. I don't really hear that anymore. And it's a lot more students who dance on campus, and they dance, whether it's HBCU-style hip-hop. Just plain majorette, ballet. It's students in the band who put dance content online, and they receive a lot more support from their fellow band constituents, something I've never thought that I would see in this collegiate world.
Steven Jones
You say you started at Jackson State in what year?

Student E
2010.

Steven Jones
So, from 2010 to now, you've seen a vast difference?

Student E
A vast difference, yes. Yes, indeed.

Steven Jones
How often does the institution, well, I think you have already answered this question in terms of how often they offer LGBTQ-related activities. That's zero, right?

Student E
Right. They don't offer any LGBTQ student related activities.

Steven Jones
So how do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus?

Student E
So how does it feel about?

Steven Jones
How do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus? People like you who are faculty and staff. How would you feel about that?

Student E
I feel like that's need to be honest. I feel like, if college is such this diverse place, where you're gonna have students from all walks of life, they need that. They are going to need to have this support. If you are going to ensure a good student graduation rate. And I say that because it's a lot of things people go through when they leave home, and I'm saying that for myself. I'm saying it for other people that I've talked to, they're gonna need that support. Especially if they left home for like, collegial reasons. If people are going to indulge in their lives, and indulge in the things that they like, and the things that are of meaning to them, and if it involves LGBTQ, they're going to need that. There's no way a student can come to campus as a freshman, and not be educated. It's something that you can help them with. It's something that you can show them to say, oh, well yeah, I can do this differently, and you won't get the same outcome. I know for sure that the HIV rate could go down. Starting with the school, it could go down. If you had a provost on campus, or how ever many people you decide, those are people who can help the ones that don't get help.
Steven Jones
So, what does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you? We talked about diversity and inclusion, and we talked about Jackson State University, what ideally would a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

Student E
To me, it would look like another world, meaning, from the day that you first meet the students, you would have provost up there. And my thing is, there is a way to introduce yourself to people without them being offended, or there's a way for you to reach students without them having to present themselves to say, oh, I'm going to talk to LGBTQ rep or provost at the school? They shouldn't feel like, oh, I have to sneak through the back door there. There are ways to do that. So just have an office on campus. Just have a building, you know, and students don't have to be seen going there. They can make an appointment. The provost maybe can come to them. The provost doesn't even have to wear LGBTQ colors, but to know that there is someone on campus that you can talk to, that speaks volumes. Because everybody is not the same. You have some people that would like for their provost to wear Pride colors. You may have a student who wants a provost who looks like a female or looks straight, you know or is straight. It's just some type of panel there to help everybody and anybody.

Steven Jones
So, when considering your experience at Jackson State, and considering the things that Jackson State does not offer an LGBTQ student, would you recommend Jackson State to other prospective LGBTQ students? Why or why not?

I'm sorry. You are breaking up on Student E?

Student E
Can you hear me now?

Steven Jones
Yes, I can.

Student E
I'm sorry. I'm traveling.

Steven Jones
No problem.

Student E
Let's see if I can get a better signal.

Are you there?
Steven Jones
I'm still here.

Student E
What about now? Is it better?

Steven Jones
Yes, it is.

Student E
Okay, sorry, I guess I was going through a bad area.

Steven Jones
That's no problem. So, I'll repeat the question. So as a LGBTQ student at Jackson State, and when considering that there are not many resources available to LGBTQ students, and considering the type of campus environment there, would you recommend Jackson State to other prospective LGBTQ students? Why are Why not?

Student E
Yes, I will recommend Jackson State still to other LGBTQ students because I still put education first. Regardless of what we may be going through, or the type of resources that we need, because school is now online. That's primarily why I would. I still believe in education, and I still believe that, you know, if someone wants to complete a program, or has a goal for themselves or career path, your sexuality shouldn't be a reason why you shouldn't go for it. But in regards to living and social life, and being active on campus, where you're among other peers and cohorts, yeah, you would need some type of help. But because we're not in that mode right now, I would still refer someone to Jackson State because like I said, education is still important. And now more than ever, you can reach out online to people, and talk to them, and not necessarily have to rely on the school for those resources in person.

Steven Jones
What can Jackson State do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students? What can they do differently, if anything, to make LGBTQ students' experience better?

Student E
They could allow students voices to be heard, and they could allow students to create their own, I guess, alliance. Allow students to be comfortable while at your institution, in their in their sexuality. Just give them somewhere to go. Give them a panel or some type of outlet in the social world so that they can say, you know, I've had the opportunity to speak with whoever about it. Because there are people who work at Jackson State, more than likely willing to work with LGBTQ students, if they are not one themselves.
Steven Jones
Okay. So, describe your experience living in student housing. I know you mentioned that you had a roommate on campus, and I assume based on what you've mentioned before, that he was a welcoming and accepting person of the LGBTQ lifestyle. But how was student housing staff? Did you feel comfortable and safe when you lived in student housing?

Student E
Oh, yes. Student housing staff were very professional. And they provided any type of support for anything that you need in regards to, how can you have company or, um, where do I need to go to get, you know, little things, like tissue and mouthwash and stuff like that. They provided some type of help, but in regards to people for LGBTQ, I don't think I could go downstairs and say, hey, I think my friends has herpes, you know, who can I go talk to? I have herpes, can I go talk to someone? I don't think that the staff was, you know, geared towards helping someone with that. They may have referred you to the hospital or something. But on a normal note, they were supportive. They made sure you were safe; they didn't let anyone in the building who was not supposed to be there. And if someone came up from another building, that was a student that wanted to visit, they will let them sign in and let them leave their ID down for security reasons. And it was a time limit. And they didn't allow opposite sex, which I felt that was kind of silly, but yeah.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, tell me about your experience interacting with heterosexual students on campus.

Student E
Um, interacting with heterosexual students, for the most part, it was okay. But I can't say being around majority band people, there were some shots taken because I feel like people look at people's sexuality with their eyes, if that makes sense. If you look straight, then they're gonna presume that you're straight and they're gonna say things around you that may or may not offend you. For example, me being in the band. If all of us were in line and we're doing like calisthenics and exercise, they will say, what's wrong? You know, are you feeling a little weak? Do you want to go home to your mom? Uh, you acting like a little girl. Let's go punk boy, or let's go lady, you know, they will call you a lady or say demeaning things, and they don't know maybe if that offends you or not. Or they'll say we're gonna go do some exercise and if you see a girl, you better talk to her, or you better speak or you are going have to do extra pushups. You know what I'm saying? Those were things like they that you went through as a student, whether you were gay, straight bi, it didn't matter. They kind of looked at you and presumed you with their eyes. And to me it was kind of annoying because a lot of bandsman and even other classmates that were at Jackson State, they will presume that and they will say, man, where hoes at, or you going up to the girl's dorm night, and I'm looking like, why would I do that? You know, I've never spoken to you about visiting a girl, so they kind of just looked at you and pushups presume with their eyes, and that was annoying. As a student, you really
don't, I didn't care about disclosing whether I was straight or gay. At that point, by 2010, I'm not here to really fornicate or talk to any students who I felt attractive because I was there for a goal. So, to hear that, it was kind of like I said, it didn't really make a lot of sense. It didn't really make me feel welcome in regards to my college experience because everyone looked at you and want you to say, yes or no, or let's go talk to these girls. They wanted you to do what they want you to do, and I don't agree with that.

Steven Jones
Well, as a student, have you ever witnessed or been a victim of homophobic acts on campus?

Student E
Yes.

Steven Jones
Those things happened to you personally or you witnessed it?

Student E
Once, I had this interaction with a friend of mine. He is a dancer. He really considers himself someone of an artistic nature. Like, he's very artistic. He likes to put out content on social media. So, we were in Wendy's, and he's a student at Jackson State, a business major. And I guess this guy that was in this crowd, like on campus, they had like some sort of, they call it a hotspot. And the music was playing and this person that I'm talking about, he went out there and showcased some his skills and talents. And you know, the crowd, the kids around, they kind of cheer him all, other students. And when we got to Wendy's, I think he seen someone that was out there. And he was with a couple of other guys and he was like, oh, that's that dude that was doing all of that gay shit. And then, you know, he was like, oh, the guy looked at him and he was like, dang. I'm looking around, like, what possesses someone to even, you know, say something like that. And it's like, if you don't respect it, or you don't like it, or whatever the case is, you don't really have to even say anything. You know, if I felt like if that was me, I probably would have retaliated. And that's an odd thing for me, being around students who are out and students who don't care to disclose their information. You know, you have to deal with listening to other people bashing. You have to deal with other people having their comments out loud. And I just don't feel like that's right? That's one thing I wish the campus could enforce as well. You know, be who you are and live in your truth, but respect the next individual. Because you hear that a lot. You hear students who don't indulge in any of the arts, and yet when they are around their friends or there with a group of people, they feel compelled to voice their opinion, and I don't know if it's for clout or accolades or to fit in, but you have to hear that and you have to hear it primarily in the black community. And it just doesn't seem fair.

Steven Jones
So how are your instructors at Jackson State in preventing homophobia in the classroom?
Student E
I can't really say how successful they are. But I know that they have a job to do, so I imagined that they would cease any type of discrimination if it comes up in their class. But as I've been in classes physically and online, I've never really came in contact with a student who makes a lewd remark or ill comments toward another student that's LGBTQ related. So, for the most part, I think professors kind of do a good job of keeping their class structured and going along with lesson.

Steven Jones
You mentioned earlier about your roommate who would go off campus and meet with other individuals and things of that nature, and so my question to you is, what steps do the institution take to ensure campus safety for all students?

Student E
Well, that gate that students pull through, they don't really check anymore to see if you're a student. They just kind of you let the window down and you communicate with them where you're going, or if you need to go somewhere, and they know where you're going, they'll give you that information, but they don't really say hey, are you a student? Let me see your ID. Um, because I know that people from the city come through there to do different things. Whether it's drop off something, pick up something, pick up someone or drop off someone. They don't really enforce that. They don't really have a set strategy on how to protect students from that car perspective when they're pulling in. For me, they could strengthen it up. They could only allow people who are students to come through there. And if they're not, then the student needs to come walk out to the gate to meet that person that way, it will be on camera that, you know, if a student comes up missing, or if they're sexually assaulted or anything like that. At least they will be on camera, where they walked out to the security gate, and were picked up because allowing someone to come on campus, then you allow them to come into, you know, in contact with others that they could possibly meet up or whatever. Because I know a couple of times this parking lot where the gym is, I've heard a couple of stories where they just meet. People will pull in and they'll pull in the parking lot where the basketball games are and the person would walk out from the dorm and go sit in the car with them and they'll do whatever, or they'll pull off and go somewhere else. So, this is a few measures that they could take to prevent something like that. Like I said earlier, when you have the student orientation, I don't understand what's the, you know, they could talk about sex in that orientation. I wouldn't talk about it at the beginning, but as you're talking to those different classes, they have to spend the next four years at that institution, you want to make sure that you cover everything you can. You want to make sure that you talk about everything that goes on at a college. Because there's no need to have an ugly truth that hidden, or that's not put out there to parent. The parents are the ones who are going to worry about their kids in college. And you should ease that by showing that education in front of them, when the parents are there with their kids at orientation. Allowed them to see that you're talking about these apps that are out there. Allow the parents to see that you know, the types of meetups and situations that college students are getting involved in, and how the opioids and other drugs are being included in these sexual acts. Because
now I feel like, you know, if it wasn't for Corona, and people were still making contact, that's a gateway for people to get hooked on drugs and hooked on sex and drugs. They don't talk about that and students are doing that. I've seen in some cases where college students are all inquiring about the apps to find drugs. So, you got to talk about it, you got to put it out there and have some type of strategy to say, look, I know what's going on. And I know that, you know, these opportunities and choices are being brought to these college students, but you don't have to be silent about it, and just say you know, he hears no evil. Talk about it because then I feel like maybe that'll put a lot more pressure on the kids. Even older students like myself who still have to make those choices.

Steven Jones
So if you had an opportunity to approach the president of the college as well as the vice president of students affairs, the provost; you're in a conference room, and you had an opportunity to tell them all about your experiences as a college student, and in particular, an LGBTQ student, what would you want them to know?

Student E
If I had an opportunity to meet with the President?

Steven Jones
Yes.

Student E
I would want them to know that your college is a lot more diverse than you think. It goes beyond skin tone. It goes beyond diverse learning system. It goes beyond just sports and activities. Because in every activity and every organization that you have on campus, I can guarantee you, it's at least one LGBTQ person. So that one person shouldn't have to go an alternative route to get the things that they want, the things that they need. You have to open your eyes because I feel like now, and I'm still talking to the President, I feel like now, it's a lot more people that are coming out. It's a lot more people that are exposed to the likes and dislikes of the LGBTQ world through social media. Porn is a click away. So, with that being said, strengthen your hears institution by diversifying it with LGBTQ education, diversifying it with LGBTQ representatives, diversifying it with having a resource and outlet for those types of students. Because I wouldn't want my roommates to have to leave campus to go get checked. I wouldn't want my roommate to even leave campus at two o'clock in the morning when we have to be in class at eight o'clock. I don't want that. So, strengthen your program by ensuring, not making sure that students don't leave campus, but ensuring that if you're going to make that decision, the institution has taken every step possible. And in that case, I just feel like with every step is probably not gonna happen. If you got LGBTQ representatives on campus, people who are willing to talk to students daily, weekly, and help them get over that developing an addiction to sex. That are developing an addition to drugs and sex, or feeling like they want somebody why they're continuing their education. If you have representatives like that, you will strengthen your retention rate. You will strengthen all of the things that have failed so many students, and that will allow students who aren't out and want to be
able to talk to somebody, you'll give them that. That will probably be the best choices they have made going to college.

Steven Jones
Well, I would like to conclude by asking is there anything else you would like to add?

Student E
Not really. I feel like I've been blabbing.

Um, I can say that I do appreciate you giving me this opportunity because, not strangely, but satisfyingly, I feel better. I feel a lot better. I feel like I've digested a little bit.

Steven Jones
Right. And that's an important part about this. Not only is it research that sparks more of a scholarly conversation about this topic, but it also provides an outlet for those same students that are sitting in the same seat you were sitting in, that's coming into Jackson State who really don't know what their identity is. They have a struggle; they may have a past. They have things that are haunting them, and they need to be able to have the outlet to see other students who identify. So that's part of it. So, it's sort of like therapy without saying its therapy.

Student E
Real talk, I promise.

Steven Jones
Well, man, I do appreciate it once again. Once the research has been complete, I'm going to send you a copy, because I would like for you to have a copy of it as well. And so, I would like for you to give me some feedback. Tell me what you think. Because I like to hear from you as well.

Student E
Yeah, most definitely.

Steven Jones
Well, thank you. Again, enjoy the rest of your Sunday afternoon. Be safe out there.

Student E
Thank you.
Student F – Interview Transcript
Interview Date: Friday, June 26, 2020 at 10:00 A.M.

Steven Jones
Alright, so thank you once again for your interest in my study, I greatly appreciate it. I am going to try to make this as painful as possible. As we talked about in our initial conversation, I really just want you to be comfortable, and I want you to be able to feel free speaking openly about your experience at an HBCU. Before we get started with the interview, I just want to confirm once again for the record that you are 18 years of age or older and you do self-identify as a LGBTQ student. Can I get affirmation of that?

Student F
Yes, that's true.

Steven Jones
And what institution do you attend?

Student F
Jackson State University.

Steven Jones
Okay, awesome.

So, let's get started, shall we? Tell me a little bit about yourself?

Student F
Oh, well, my name is Student F. I'm from XXXXXX, XXXXXX. I'm an English major. I'm graduating. I'm a writer. I'm an artist. I'm planning to go to graduate school and study African Diasporic Religions and/or Linguistics. I haven't decided. Oh, yeah, that's a little about me.

Steven Jones
Okay, so tell me what led to your decision to attend an HBCU?

Student F
Oh, it was mainly wanting to be in an environment like, with people like myself, like other black people, like I've always gone to all white schools. And I just wanted to be around other black kids for once in an academic setting and it was more comfortable and more inviting. Yeah, that's why.

Steven Jones
So, tell me about your coming out story. What was the experience like for you?
Student F
Oh, it wasn't really.

Student F
I don't know. It kinda was like, it wasn't really one time, it was kind of like a continual thing. Like it wasn't really something I feel like I had come out about. I was just being myself, and I guess the kind of first time I really like said something, it was kind of like, kind of a joke. Me and my cousin were talking. I was just like, she was like, I wonder what our mommas would think, life if we were gay or whatever. And I was like, I don't know, let's see. So, I went downstairs and I was like, oh, momma, I'm gay. Like, she just stared at me. She was like, she didn't really react. I don't know, it's been over time, I guess, my family members would be asking me about it, and I would flippantly say stuff. Well, yeah. And, like, I would talk openly about it. If they would ask me about it, I would be like, yeah. It wasn't like any major panic or anything. Yeah.

Steven Jones
So, your mom is very open and supportive of you being gay. What about your father? Does your father know?

Student F
Oh, he knows. Yeah, they don't. They don't really care. I don't know if they didn't care because they didn't take me seriously or they just didn't care because they didn't care.

Steven Jones
So, if you could change one or two things about your college experience. What would it be and why?

Student F
Um, if I could change? Um, well, I think I would probably try to be more like involved in stuff, but I just thought, I think I would try to like find outside things to do that like aligned with my interest. Because that was like a big thing for me after my first semester. I just felt like I wasn't being challenged. I didn't feel like I found any like-minded people like myself, or open-minded people. I just kind of felt like, I don't know. I wasn't like, I liked the environment and being around other kids like myself, but I didn't feel like intellectually or like interest wise or mindset wise. I would have tried to find like a group outside of the school that I could have connect with. That had my similar interest and mindset.

Steven Jones
What is the campus environment like for you at Jackson State? As a LGBTQ student, what is the campus environment like?

Student F
Uh, sorry, my phone is ringing? The house phone is ringing. Um.
Steven Jones
What about belonging? Do you feel like you belong there?

Student F
Oh, well, in terms of like belonging or just feeling. Oh, I mean, it's hard to say because I wasn't really just like, you know, super, like, you know, I just kind of stayed in my own lane. I wasn't really like always announcing, like people that were like my friends knew but I wasn't really. We do have a gay lesbian group, I think, at our school also. I guess they have that but, um, I don't feel like I didn't belong, but I kind of felt like I was on the outskirts. Not because of my sexuality, but just in general because I just feel like I never really found people that were like-minded, a steady group of people. But other kids that I know of that are queer like, I don't know, they would find each other. I didn't really connect with them per se, but yeah, I saw kids that were gay and they would be open about it. They would kind of be on the margins as well, so Jackson State is not, not welcoming, but they are not, I don't know. They are not the best, but they are not the worst.

Steven Jones
So, what does your institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging on campus? Do they? I know you said they may have like a Gay Straight Alliance on campus.

Student F
I know they had a group that people met up like, in the dormitory and like, had open conversation and stuff like that. I know they had a group. They don't have any resources, like any safe spaces or anything that I knew of. Yeah, it wasn't much. They had that one group, but other than that, I don't know.

Steven Jones
What is the ideal HBCU experience and does choosing Jackson State meet the qualifications? So, for you what would be the ideal HBCU experience?

Student F
Um, I feel the ideal HBCU experience, I guess is feeling like you have a community close to you. Making sure that you your mental health is attended to and accounted. Having a support system. Making sure your mental health is straight. Making sure you're challenging. You feel, you know, stimulated by what you're learning or what you're doing. Yeah, that's how I feel.

Steven Jones
Okay, so we talked about resources. So, thinking back to when you first decided to attend an HBCU. And whenever that may have been; it might have been in high school; it might have been right before you decide to enter college; so thinking back when you were first decided to attend an HBCU, and giving the lived experiences that you've had on campus now, did you make the right choice to attend Jackson State?
Student F
Well, initially, I felt like I didn't because I didn’t feel like I was around like-minded people. And I didn't feel like the environment was conducive to my intellectual stuff that I was interested in. But over time, I feel like I made the right choice because everything aligned in the end. I more so found outside things, and my professors introduced me to things that aligned with my interest. I feel like I did make the right choice. I just didn't know that at that time.

Steven Jones
Okay. So, describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students.

Student F
Oh, well, in terms of people that I do know, they are respectful. I know there is a transgender student, and once they started transitioning, the professor respected their pronouns and respected the name they chose to use for themselves. So, I feel like they are respectful and supportive. And then I know there was like a transgender student back in the day, and she has a little podcast that I found, but she was saying like, she was like the first transgender student at Jackson State and how, like, they had this whole assembly for her and like, they all were like, oh, you're not gonna disrespect her. And, you know, they kind of made it clear, like they're very transparent like that, you know, they weren't going to be disrespectful towards her, that she was going to be cared for like any other, so, they do okay. They are not bad about that.

Steven Jones
That's awesome to hear.

If you could choose one word to describe your college experience. What would it be and why?

Student F
Transformative. I say it was transformative because, not so much because of like, what my professors, like the classes I took. I guess the challenges that I had, forced me to like, change the way I did things and change within so, yeah, I would say transformative for sure.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So how successful is your institution in communicating available LGBTQ resources to the students there? Do you see things being advertise? Do they promote different events?

Student F
Nah, they suck there. They suck with advertising at Jackson State is not the best. If it's not a sporting event, yeah, they don't do too good with that. But I guess they will try to put up a flyer and they will send out the little email blasts, like similar to the one I saw
when you posted your research inquiry. So yeah, they have the emails and then they post stuff up, but they don't be announcing it like they do with the sports events and stuff like that.

**Steven Jones**  
So how often does institution offer LGBTQ-related activities on campus?

**Student F**  
To be honest, I don't really know. The one time I did see, that was like, once. I don't know how often, so I'm not really sure. But I guess once every once in a while, I suppose.

**Steven Jones**  
So, are there any classes that Jackson State offer for diversity and inclusion?

**Student F**  
Regarding like, different sexuality or identities?

**Steven Jones**  
Multicultural, any type of class that would help you to learn how to be accepting of different cultures, different ideas? Have they had any programs on campus about inclusion and, you know, equity, diversity, LGBTQ relations or anything of that nature?

**Student F**  
Um, not that I know of.

**Steven Jones**  
Okay.

So how do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus?

**Student F**  
Um, I mean, it's cool. I mean, nobody has openly identified, you know, amongst the faculty there. If I was aware of it, that would be cool.

**Steven Jones**  
So, what does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you? In your mind, when we talk about diversity and inclusion for campus, what does that look like?

**Student F**  
The first thing that came to mind was being more open-minded to all types of black experiences. I felt that at Jackson State it was very, we are black, Southern, Christian, kind of conservative, etcetera. And I feel like for a lot of kids that came from outside areas, you know, that was kind of stifling because there was only so much within that culture that was not acceptable, but just that was done. So, maybe more like not centering, just one type of experience, not even just sexually, but just religious, you
know? Just being more inclusive of complex blackness for all students. Because all black students, they are not all Southern. They're not all conservative. You know, they're not all Christian. They're not all straight, you know, class differences. So yeah, just not centering the black, Southern, Christian, culture-type experience only.

**Steven Jones**
Would you recommend your HBCU to another LGBTQ student, a prospective student? So, if I was a prospective LGBTQ student, and I was trying to decide on which HBCU I was going to attend, would you recommend Jackson State? And why or why not?

**Student F**
Uh, no. I wouldn't honestly. I mean, if that's like, because if your sexual orientation is something that you know, you feel, if it won't be validated, you won't be okay. Or if like, somebody, if it's not in an accepting environment, you won't be, your wellbeing won't be well, then no, I would not.

**Steven Jones**
Okay.

So, what can your HBCU do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students? So, what can they do to make it better for you?

**Student F**
Um, that's a hard question. Because it's really a cultural thing. Because Jackson State is so, uh, yeah, it's kind of, I don't know. That's a hard question. I mean, I feel they could do more to like, make safe spaces for queer students and, you know, be more like, inclusive on that front and not just center certain events that certain type of kids like to do, you know. Maybe make more of an effort to be more like, inclusive and like, center queer students also. Center them within like events or center them just in general. Just recognize that they're there. Maybe that would just help. Maybe the higher up folks, you know, would just make events that center them, or just recognize them in general. That would probably make it better for a lot of kids. Because there are like a lot of closeted kids at school. And I don't know if they are like that because they just choose to be, or the culture in general, but yeah, I feel like they should just recognize that they exist would help.

**Steven Jones**
So, if you were sitting in a room right now with the Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at Jackson State, and the question was, what can we do as college administrators to make your college experience better as a gay student? What would be that one recommendation?

**Student F**
Probably just provide more resources, and do it more efficiently so that people can know. For queer students, provide more safe spaces. I guess to help them maintain their
wellbeing. Just check up on them and just have a space where they can talk openly and just be, you know, seen. That's all.

Steven Jones
Okay.

Tell me about your experience interacting with students who are not LGBTQ? Do you have good interactions with other students on campus that don't identify as being gay? How do students treat you, those who know your sexuality? Talk to me a bit about that experience.

Student F
Oh, well, very few people know or knew. But if it came up in class, or just outside of class anything. If it came up, and I said something, I mean, nobody would just outright dog me or say something rude, but they just might be like, oh, okay, or like, you know, they might have been taken back. They are not going to say anything rude to my face. But yeah, I mean, it's definitely like some people who will express their discomfort or express their discomfort I guess, but they're not rude. But other people, like other students that are more like, open about who they are, like more flamboyant, like, especially gay males, like I've seen like a lot of like, people like dogging them, or degrading them in public or like talking down to them and stuff. So, I haven't had any negative experiences. Like people will be taken back, but it is not as, really not as bad as like, um, the treatment that I have seen, like, my gay male peers get. Yeah, they get it way worse. That's my opinion.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, tell me how the institution ensures that LGBTQ students are equally represented and supported on campus. Do you feel that they're equally represented and supported?

Student F
Oh, of course not.

Steven Jones
Do you feel equally represented and supported?

Student F
No, but I wasn't really needing to be acknowledged by my school. So, it didn't really get to me like that. But um, there's definitely a discrepancy. Not having the same, you know, structures in place to care for queer students doesn't exist? It doesn't exist. If they say it does exist, just from like having the counseling center, that's not adequate enough because, yeah, people need like something or at least like one specialist that can help, you know, assistance students with their identity, you know, challenges or whatnot. So, yeah,
that is definitely a discrepancy and something that doesn't really exist and probably something that will be helpful if it was put in place.

**Steven Jones**
Okay,

So, let's switch gears. Let's talk a little bit about student housing. Do you live in student housing?

**Student F**
Yes, I have over the past four years.

**Steven Jones**
Describe your experience living in student housing. Did you have a roommate? Was your roommate welcoming? Were they open and accepting to have a LGBTQ student in the room? And how was the housing staff? Were they supportive?

**Student F**
Oh, well, yeah, I had roommates for the first two years. They didn't know my sexuality. I didn't really like talk about it like that, so they didn't really know. The roommates I had were not the best, but I never saw them as being homophobic or anything. And then the staff, the RAs, I believe at times they would. Like, the RAs, you know, they had to have different little meetings about things, dialogues about stuff at Jackson State. So, I think they did have times where they would have little talks and dialogue with the other students in the dorm and halls about that. They're pretty open, like the RAs, they had conversation around that.

**Steven Jones**
Have you ever witnessed or been a victim to homophobic act on campus?

**Student F**
I haven't been a victim of it, but I have witnessed people be targeted and like taunted for it. Yeah, I have.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, and do you feel like it is more prominent among LGBTQ women or LGBTQ men?

**Student F**
The man. The hateful acts and stuff is worse towards the man, I would say.

**Steven Jones**
Okay.
And when we talk about homophobic act, have you seen, and of course, we're talking about mistreatment, so have you seen like physical acts of violence against these individuals or has it been mostly verbal?

**Student F**
I mean, um, I haven't seen it come to the physical violence but I have definitely seen like, somebody making comments. They don't even really have to be talking about being gay. I guess just the way they would present. That would trigger somebody like, usually it's like another male, like, a straight gender male or whatever. Uh, yeah, like just their very presence like, I guess them being flamboyant or whatever. Yeah, they'll say something. I have seen people getting into and arguing and going back and forth. Throwing slurs and stuff like that. Yeah, I've seen that a lot. Yeah, like they would be just talking about them just like they're not there. Yeah.

**Steven Jones**
During the times that you witnessed these homophobic acts, have there been faculty and staff around who have also witnessed it?

**Student F**
Yeah, sometimes. But you know how sometimes people would say, I guess throw shade. Like it would be like shady. What you would call microaggression-type stuff. They would throw shade or little side comments. As if it's unjust but they are really trying to be hurtful, I guess. Like in the classroom, like people will say stuff like that. Like they'll make little shady comments but yeah, and I guess no. The professors don't intervene. They be like, y'all are grown. Y'all work it out.

**Steven Jones**
My next question, and I think you've kind of answered it, was how successful are instructors or professors in preventing homophobic acts within the classroom setting, but it sounds like to me, from what you just mentioned, they kind of just brush it off or act like it didn't happen.

**Student F**
Right? Yeah. Yeah, they slip. I guess when it comes to, like them being around those type of things, they feel as though it's just something y'all need to work out on your own.

**Steven Jones**
So, my last question would be, what steps does the institution take to ensure safety of all students on campus? Do you as a gay student at Jackson State feel completely safe and protected? Why or why not?

**Student F**
I don't, but it's not just a function of being a queer student. I guess just in general Jackson State doesn't have the best track record, and I am sure they are not the only one, but like in terms of like, even like physical safety or like just feeling safe, like, emotionally or like what do you mean?
Steven Jones
So, when I think about campus safety, I think about one you know, if I live in a residence hall, is my residence hall adequately secure. When I think about being safe from a LGBTQ student perspective, I think it's more so about okay, is law enforcement actually provide different strategies to prevent me from being assaulted if I'm walking across campus late at night. Is there any type of quick access points that I can get to in order to alert law enforcement for help? Are there safe spaces? Are there safe space signs where I know that, hey, I can run in that building and know that I'm going to be safe if I'm being attacked or physically harmed. So, from that viewpoint, do you feel safe?

Student F
Nah, I don't. Some of my friends that I have known, a lot of them have been sexually assaulted on campus. Oh yeah, we have a really bad, bad, bad, problem like with that. A lot of students have like, in their first years or first semesters of college, they've been assaulted. My one friend, this random person, who is just off the street, just somehow ended up raping her. And yeah, our campus is very open, so we have like a lot of problems like that. And then I know one of my friends, one of my friends, one of my peers, he had an experienced where he was like drunk in his dormitory, and like he was like, in his RA, like, brought him into the room and like his RA ended up like sexually assaulting him while he was drunk. And like he told me that he went to the police and like, they didn't do anything. They were just like, oh, you got raped by another man, uh, don't know what to do. So, there's been a lot of stuff like that at Jackson State. Like, they had this whole thing where my friend told me after she got assaulted, like, well, she knew other people that had been assaulted and they would go to the Latasha Norman Center, which is our counseling center. She told me how they would be trying to cover it up and take girls out of their classes, and tell them they need to withdraw from school, I guess to like, cover up what have been going on. She told me that a lot of counselors have been fired and stuff, and they had to replace people because they had really messed students over in a vulnerable time in their life. Yeah, I know a lot of people that have been assaulted on campus by strangers, other students, and they don't really do anything. So, they have a bad track record.

Steven Jones
Wow.

Well, is there anything else you would like to add?

Student F
I think one of the things that I personally think about is just how kind of exclusive the southern HBCU experience can be. How like centering just one certain type of experience can be harmful. And then not recognizing students of different experiences, and how that can be harmful. Yeah, there is a culture at Jackson State that doesn't allow people to, like feel safe. Especially, like, I told you about my friend. I think he is out of the closet, like bisexual or whatever. I feel like a lot of students, not a lot of them, but I know just some people that have left school because they have been assaulted or they felt
like they just didn't fit into, they felt like there was a narrow experience at Jackson State. Yeah, that's something I hear a lot like from people that have gone to Jackson State, like including myself, I used to feel like this, they go to Jackson State, like they feel like, oh, we were so closed-minded, like people are so narrow-minded. They just think that Mississippi is all there is and they just only have this one view, so I feel like maybe just trying to center and expand like what, you know, a black experience can be outside of just one thing, and try to, you know, actually create spaces where people, like students of different experiences can feel seen. You know, feel accounted for through their wellbeing.

**Steven Jones**  
Okay. So that's all the questions that I have.

So, once again, I appreciate it. Thank you so much. I'll be in touch. Of course, once my research is complete, I'll be emailing you a copy for your own file. You can read it and give me feedback.

So, thank you again. I appreciate it.

**Student F**  
Thank you. Have a nice day.

**Steven Jones**  
You do the same. Until next time, stay safe.

**Student F**  
Okay, you do the same.

**Steven Jones**  
Bye
**Student G – Interview Transcript**
Interview Date: Friday, June 26, 2020 at 1:00 P.M.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so thank you for your interest in my study. I greatly appreciate it. Are you excited? You look inside?

**Student G**
Yeah, I mean, there is no reason to not be excited.

**Steven Jones**
Awesome, awesome, awesome. Well, hey, we're gonna jump right in because we got a lot of questions and we want to be able to get as far as we possibly can within our two-hour time frame. So, let me start off by recapping and getting a little bit of confirmation from you that you are 18 years of age or older and you self-identify as LGBTQ student. Is that correct?

**Student G**
Yes.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so can you tell me about your college classification? Are you a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior?

**Student G**
I'm a second semester freshman.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, and which institution do you attend?

**Student G**
I attend Jackson State University.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so let's start off by telling me a little bit about yourself. As much as you want to share without identifying who you are.

**Student G**
Let's see. I'm a computer science major. I love technology. I love to paint. I love art. I love music. I love food. That's all I can say about myself off the top of my head.
Steven Jones
Okay, so tell me about your decision to attend an HBCU. What led to that decision?

Student G
I wanted to be, let's see, I wanted to be comfortable. I rather go to a HBCU than a PWI. Just growing up and seeing how in movies, it just felt that I belonged at a HBCU. I chose this HBCU though because my parents went there. They're paying for it and I'm a legacy. So, it all just made sense.

Steven Jones
Okay. Alright. So, what is your religious affiliation? Are you a Baptist, Methodist, Catholic?

Student G
Um, I believe there is a God, but I don't identify with one specific religion.

Steven Jones
So, my follow up question to that is, how much does religion influence your choice in your lifestyle?

Student G
It doesn't really affect it at all, because I feel that sometimes religion is used as a way to keep people from doing things, so it doesn't really influence my decisions at all.

Steven Jones
So, here's a fun question. Tell me about your coming out story. How did it begin? Where were you? Who were you talking to? What was the responses that you received? How was the experience?

Student G
Okay, so I just came out to my parents last week.

Steven Jones
Oh, wow, okay.

Student G
I came out to my mom actually. I couldn't do it to my dad because he was giving me a serious face and I didn't know how to tell him. But my mom, I sat her down. I was like, mom, I'm bisexual. She was like, well, how long have you known? I've known my whole life. But you know, as a kid, you don't want to tell your parents and they be like, you're going through a phase or anything. I didn't want that. So, I just wanted to kind of figure it out. Then I was kind of tripping myself like, you don't, but do you, but you don't. My mom said she was going to pray for me. She just wanted me to be happy. My friends are pretty accepting of it, so, that was that.
Steven Jones
Okay, so how did you feel after having that conversation with your mom?

Student G
I felt like a weight was lifted off. I finally said it to somebody, like the person who made me. So that made me feel better. I didn't want her to assume, so it felt good coming out. Honestly, I don't ever think I will tell my dad.

Steven Jones
You don't think you are going to tell your dad?

Student G
No.

Steven Jones
Do you feel that in not telling him that, you know, maybe you feel like he's going to be disappointed or is it just that fear of rejection from him? What's holding you back from telling your dad?

Student G
I don't think it's gonna be rejection because I do have a gay sister. I'm not ready for him to look at me differently yet. I don't know what the reaction is going to be. He's such a wild card. So that's, I don't know if it is going to be good or bad, so I'm gonna wait until I'm stable enough to handle either or.

Steven Jones
Okay. Are you dating?

Student G
Yes.

Steven Jones
Okay. Because you're dating, did that lead to your decision to come out to your parents or has been something that you really just wanted to do, and you just decided last week that it was going to be the day?

Student G
Um, no. let's see. I felt that, I going through a, you know, an acceptance phase. You like accept everything in life when you're growing up, so I thought that was a better way of me like, accepting myself by telling my mom. To her accept me, the person that made me, it just makes me feel better. So, that was that. I don't think me dating influence that. I just wanted it to be, well, just in case I do bring home a woman, I don't want it to be a surprise. So, that did influence it.
Steven Jones
So, tell me about your relationship with your parents. Do you have a good relationship with your parents?

Student G
Yeah, my dad, he's a bit, he's very hard on me because he feels that black women have to be tougher in society. He's not a very emotional person, so that's made me not a very emotional person. But I am emotional like, I'm a very emotional person. But I can't let it out because I don't want my dad to be like, what are you doing. My mom, she will just sit there and watch me cry. She understands that I'm emotional. She will get over it. My dad, you know, but yeah, we have a pretty good relationship.

Steven Jones
Nice. So, if you could change one or two things about your college experience at Jackson State, what would it be?

Student G
Um, I think everything has been pretty great, actually. Probably more LGBTQ representation, because I, it's very, I don't know how do I say it. It's not very shown on our campus. I'm glad that you're doing it for your campus, but it's not very shown at our campus. LGBTQ. I don't think there's anything I really want to change besides that though.

Steven Jones
Alright. So, what is the campus environment like for LGBTQ students at Jackson State?

Student G
It's kind of hard for me. I'm going to speak from my experience because I don't know anybody from Mississippi. I live in Georgia.

Steven Jones
Okay.

Student G
So, I guess the way I look, I don't know, everybody kind of assumes that I'm heterosexual. That's really a lot of assuming. So that's just how my experiences has been. I've probably dated one girl. It's a very messy scene, very messy dating scene for LGBTQ, I would say that. Very messy, I would recommend.

Steven Jones
Okay, so, so tell me about that. Give me some examples. What makes it so?

Student G
I will just tell you the whole story.
I decided to date a basketball player. She was fully gay. She had; it was a lot. She had an ex, and I guess they hadn't fully broken up yet. She was a little crazy, and I wasn't going to deal with that. It's either the ex and y'all, or me and you. I don't like the drama. It's just a lot of drama so I left her alone.

**Steven Jones**
Gotcha. Well, um, what does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging? So, what does Jackson State do to ensure that you feel like you belong there as a gay student?

**Student G**
Oh, I don't think we have a LGBTQ group, so I just, and I didn't really make any friends or know anyone. So, I felt that I belong. Because I didn't really tell anybody. You know, I was just kind of accepted because I guess I look nice and pretty. But as far as the LGBTQ part, I don't think I've really gotten into it yet, because I have only been there one semester, and that was spring semester. So, I kind of got there late and everybody knew each already. So, I've kind of been by myself. So, it's very, it's hard kind of. Being kind of alone.

**Steven Jones**
Do you feel like you're an introvert or an extrovert in your personality?

**Student G**
I'm an introvert. I don't, I'm not one to go out and make friends, if the friend find me, that's great. But I'm not one for it.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. Are you involved in any type of extracurricular activities on campus? Any organization, sports, anything of that nature?

**Student G**
Well, I was going to join some this semester. There will be a club for the LGBTQ. There is, actually. So, I might need to bring that up as an idea.

**Steven Jones**
Yeah. What about sororities? Are you interested in that?

**Student G**
I do. I do plan on pledging.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, okay. Which sorority are you interested in?

**Student G**
I can't say that now.
Steven Jones
I kind of know. I kind of got a feeling, so you don't have to say. I'm going to guess. And then I'm going to wait for you to pledge and then you can email me one day and say, I pledged x, and then I'll be like, yeah, that's the one I kind of figured.

Student G
I can tell you it's not the one that starts with an "A".

Steven Jones
So, my next question is, what is the ideal HBCU experience and does your chosen HBCU provide that ideal experience? Why or why not?

Student G
I didn't know what college would be like, so I don't have an ideal HBCU experience. But so far, it's been great because my parents went there. So, you know, everybody that they went to school with most likely went back and work there. So, I have a bunch of aunts and uncles. So, I feel welcomed mostly because I know most of the staff. It's just really the students that I haven't really engaged in. So, my HBCU like, it's been pretty comfortable because I've always been taken care of.

Steven Jones
Okay. Alright. So what LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus? You mentioned that you really didn't know of any, so think a little bit about that. What do you know that they provide, and then what do you wish they would provide?

Student G
I have actually looked and I haven't heard anything.

Steven Jones
Okay.

Student G
Probably a safe space. Because it is hard. Not even for me, just for other people seeing it. It's hard, and for people who haven't came out. This is a time for them to explore themselves. And they need a safe space to feel comfortable and not judged. So, I would say something along those lines. I don't know the specifics, or what I'm trying to get at. But something along those lines.

Steven Jones
Okay, so thinking back to when you first decided to attend an HBCU, and given your lived experiences on campus now as an LGBTQ student, did you make the right choice in attending Jackson State University?
Student G
Yes, I would say so. Actually, I love the people even though I don't like very much get into it. I love the campus. I love the campus spirit. They have a lot of spirit. I mean, I love it.

Can you repeat the question one more time so I can make sure I answered everything?

Steven Jones
Okay. So, thinking back to when you first decided to attend an HBCU, and given your lived experience now on campus as gay student, did you make the right choice to attend Jackson State University?

Student G
Yes. I think I have made the right choice. I don't think I will transfer so yeah; I think I made the right choice.

Steven Jones
Nice. So, describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students at Jackson State.

Student G
I don't think I can answer that one. I really, I don't know, I haven't identified as LGBTQ to any of the adults or anything. I'm just now coming out to my own parents. I haven't told like, adults. My friends may know but not any adults. I don't know how that works.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, how successful is your institution in communicating available LGBTQ resources to your knowledge? Have you seen any emails? Have there been any flyers? Have there been any invitations? Have there been any bulletin board advertising? How do they communicate those things to students who may seek those type services?

Student G
I don't know. I just, they don't. I don't know.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, if you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why? What's that one magic word?
Student G
Okay, I would say very easy going. That's not one word. Um, I don't have one word to explain it. My mind is kind of blank. I kind of cleared my mind for this interview. It went very well though. My grades are great.

Steven Jones
Okay, alright. So, we'll come back to the question. I'm going let you ponder on that just for a minute, okay? So how often does the institution, well, you kind of answered this question already. We talked about how often does your institution offer LGBTQ-related activities, events, programs? Have you heard of anything? Have you seen anything? Have you heard of anything being offer?

Student G
No.

Steven Jones
So how do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus? How do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus, do you feel like it would be a plus? Do you feel like it wouldn't be a plus? Give me your thoughts on that.

Student G
I don't feel like it would be a plus or a negative because honestly, it's honestly a normal thing. So, it would, I would feel more supportive because it make me feel like I would be accepted. If I were to try to apply for a job here after I graduated to know that they're not against it. I think it wouldn't be a plus for me because it's still a normal thing. So, it'll be a negative if they wouldn't, because you're discriminating. It could be a plus, you know. Because they are accepting and willing to have a diverse staff.

Steven Jones
Yeah, well, let's look at it this way. How do you describe your relationship with faculty and staff now on campus? Do you feel like your faculty is approachable, that you can approach your faculty and talk to them about any concerns that you have?

Student G
Yes.

Steven Jones
Okay. So now looking at that from the opposite end of the spectrum, if they knew you were an LGBTQ student, let's say you did come out on campus and So, they did know. Do you feel like they would be approachable and have that same support?

Student G
Yes, because even if I didn't, I would get over it because I can't change so. So, something has to give.
Steven Jones
Gotcha. So, what does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

Student G
A diverse and inclusive HBCU?

Steven Jones
Yeah. So, what does a diverse and inclusive Jackson State look like to you?

Student G
A diverse and inclusive, I would say that for everybody to be accepted. Just everybody being accepted for who they are. Because a lot people are afraid to express themselves just because they might feel they are being looked at differently. So, I would like for everybody to accept that these things are normal. And just because you don't accept them, you have to look at it through other people's point of view. I would like everybody to start looking at everything through everybody else's point of view.

Um, diverse and inclusive, can you be more specific?

Steven Jones
Yes. So, when we talk about being diverse and inclusive, we're talking about having resources, having support, having people who are providing equal services, equal protections under the law for any and all students on campus. So, diversity would mean acceptance of all people on campus, all students on campus. Is Jackson State supportive and provide a diverse and inclusive environment.

Student G
I would say so between the students. Not so, I don't know if the faculty because we are in Mississippi, the small, rural state. And a lot of people like to bring with them the way they grew up. They have that, just very embedded in their brain. Not very willing to look at it through other people's eyes. And you can see how like, it will come off to them if you like, try to be yourself and they don't like it. You can see it. Like all in their demeanor. So, I would say, for staff, I think the student body is pretty embracing and inclusive, but for staff, I would like them to be more open and just accepting that this is the normal now. We're in 2020. Everybody's coming to themselves. Everything is very much different now. So, I would like for them to evolve with the times.

Steven Jones
Okay, so thinking back on some of the questions that I've had so far, so far, we talked about a sense of belonging. We have talked about diversity and inclusion. We have talked about religion and how that plays a big part in your lifestyle choice. We have talked about being supportive, parents being supportive of their children when they come out. And then we talked about HBCUs and being inclusive. So thinking about all of that, thinking about your experience so far, and thinking about what Jackson State stands for, as well as what they support, and when considering the environment that you've been in
this last semester, a prospective LGBTQ student looking for a HBCU home, would you or would you not recommend Jackson State University?

**Student G**
I would. The student body actually, it’s, the student body feels like actually a family. Even if you don't know each other, you still can find someone. I'm just not that type of person and just go find someone. But for anybody else, it's a very accepting campus. But if they were LGBTQ student, I would tell them not to come here like, with much hope of being seen much as a LGBTQ student, because that's not, that's honestly not what has been happening. And I'm not gonna say that they're against it, but that is just not what is happening now.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. So, in considering your response, and thinking more focused on an LGBTQ student, and what the institution represents would you consider recommending someone who is openly gay, whether it's male or female, to attend Jackson State University?

**Student G**
I've seen many openly gay people there. I don't know how to answer from that perspective because I'm not a fully gay person. I have the best of both worlds. They would receive much more discrimination typically, because they're fully gay and you're a person of color. So, I don't know if I can explain that part.

**Steven Jones**
Understood. So, what can your HBCU do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students? What can they do to improve the experience?

**Student G**
Just let us know that we are accepted. Because it's not broadcasting, those who are not probably sure with themselves, or have not came out and are still on the brinks of it, I feel like if it was known that you were more accepting, they would have a better experience. I think that's it. Just to let us know that it's okay, well not that it's okay, that it's accepted.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. So, let's shift gears. Let's talk about student housing. So, you're from Georgia, you came to Mississippi to attend Jackson State University. I'm going to assume that you live on campus. Is that a right or wrong assumption?

**Student G**
That's right.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so let's talk about student housing. Describe your experience living in student housing. Did your roommate know you were gay?
Student G
Yes.

Steven Jones
And how was that experience?

Student G
She was too.

Steven Jones
Okay. That's easy.

Student G
She was really my only, she was my roommate. So, we were really cool. I didn't know anybody. She was a sophomore. So, I just kind of attached myself to her because I don't want to go make any new friends. They're safe. We had a pretty good experience. We never like dated or anything like that. But we had a good experience. She's always accepting of whether I did, and I was always accepting of what she did. I think we were great for each other honestly, roommate wise.

Steven Jones
So, what about student housing? Were they very supportive? Did they know your sexuality or no?

Student G
We all said hi to each other. We were all nice. We waved. I didn't know them. I had a class with them but no one knew me personally.

Steven Jones
So, tell me about your experience or interactions with students on campus who were not LGBTQ. Did any of them know your sexuality? And if so, how was the treatment before and after?

Student G
The heterosexual guys love me for some reason. I don't know why, so they were really cool. Um, the girls, um, they were fine. I mean to this, I give off that, I'm not asking for your opinion. I'm just telling you type things. Really, I don't even pay attention to how they feel because it's not about them.

Steven Jones
What do you think this upcoming experience this upcoming semester is going to bring, now that you're out?
**Student G**

Honestly, I am still kind of closeted. Besides the situation where I dated this one girl openly. I hope the ex didn't tell anybody, so I don't have a problem. But I think I still will have the same outlook because I knew then I just didn't say anything. I think my outlook will be still the same, but I'm older now. I'll go in with much more. I'll probably go make friends now. And I will probably be more on the LGBTQ acceptance journey for all LGBTQ students. I will probably, let's see, I will probably start a club going back or something like that. I want to be the change.

**Steven Jones**

Okay.

**Student G**

Because I feel like, I have already accepted me and I don't really care what anybody has to say. But not everybody is like that. And I just want to kind of be that person for them, to help them like, it doesn't matter what anybody else thinks honestly, because you have to live with these. This is you. This is your life and it makes you happy. That's what I want a lot of younger people to understand.

**Steven Jones**

Okay, so then thinking back on the question of how the institution ensures that LGBTQ students are equally represented and supported on campus.

**Student G**

I feel we are equally supported because there's a lot of noticingly gay people. We're all out. I think there's no drama really with that. I think we're all good.

**Steven Jones**

Okay.

**Student G**

There’re a lot people in other clubs like, Student Government, a lot of LGBTQ members, I think we're equally represented in those cases. But as far as a club specifically for us, I don't think we are represented in that way. I think if they would like, include us and exclude us from the Student Government and the things that represents the school, that's great.

**Steven Jones**

Okay, so, have you ever witnessed or been a victim to homophobic acts on campus?

**Student G**

I haven't witnessed it because I'm either in my room or in class.
Steven Jones
Got it. So how successful are instructors and professors in preventing homophobic acts within the classroom? Have you witnessed anything in the classroom?

Student G
Yeah, I think most professors they've been through it this many times to know that there will be gay students, and so I think they are pretty fun. Teachers are actually more very accepting because they are like your class parent. So, I think they're very accepting of it, at least in my experience, they are.

Steven Jones
So, what steps do your institution take to ensure campus safety? Do you feel safe on campus?

Student G
Yes, we have on campus security. Um, let's see. Because we're women, if we go to the library too late, we can call an escort to escort us back to our dorm. We have cameras everywhere. It's security everywhere. Staff is everywhere, so hopefully we are safe. It's pretty secure.

Steven Jones
Okay, so let's go back to this question that we skipped about if you could use one word to describe your college experience what would it be?

Student G
It was very insightful.

Steven Jones
There you go, insightful.

Student G
This is my first time like, this is my mini-adult experience. So, this is my first time really going out and just being me, for me, because of me. So that was really insightful.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So if you could have a meeting with your Chancellor, your college president, and your Vice President for Student Affairs, as a LGBTQ student, and you're in this meeting face to face with them, and let's just say it's been brought up that Jackson State is not supportive of LGBTQ students, and now they want to have a meeting with you. What would be that conversation that you would have? What would you want them to know in terms of, you know, change, progress, support?
**Student G**
So, with Mississippi being the southern small Baptist state that it is, everybody assumes that if you don't come out as anything, they assume you are just straight. So, I would like to stop the assuming of the heterosexuality because it's not the time that we're in now. Everybody's different. I would like them to, they have a lot of assemblies, so I would like for them to have an assembly specifically dedicated to LGBTQ+ students to let them know that they're involved in the concern and that you actually care. And I would say just hosting a meeting with them to hear their voices because it's not just about me. I would want as a group to get group ideas.

**Steven Jones**
So, let me ask this question. Do you feel that Jackson State does a great job in implementing LGBTQ conversations or topics into the curriculum? Have you ever had any classes where examples have been used, supported, expressed, celebrated?

**Student G**
No.

**Steven Jones**
Okay.

**Student G**
Oh, health class. Yeah, read about it. And that was it. We read about the definitions. I guess it was only because it was part of the curriculum, but in no other class that that was talked about or whatever.

**Steven Jones**
Is there anything else that you would like to add? Is there anything else you would like for readers to know? This is your opportunity to tell higher education professionals all around the world, what you feel they need to know about their LGBTQ students on campus. What recommendations do you have for HBCU college presidents all over the world?

**Student G**
I don't have anything to say. But it's weird. We're just normal people. We might be a little different, but we're still normal people. It's a normal thing. When you find out that somebody is a part of the LGBTQ community, I don't want them to be looked at differently because they are this way. We are still normal people, no matter their sexuality.

**Steven Jones**
Alright. Well, I think that's a great way to sum it up. I greatly appreciate it. Thank you so much.
Student G
Thank you.

Steven Jones
Enjoy your weekend and be safe out there. And we look forward to having you back in Mississippi soon.

Student G
I'm looking forward to reading it. You have a great day.

Steven Jones
Same to you. Thank you again.

Student G
Bye
Steven Jones
Good morning, Student H.

Student H
Hello. How are you?

Steven Jones
I'm well. How are you?

Student H
I'm making it fine to say the least.

Steven Jones
Good, good.

Well, hey, thank you again for your interest in my study. I greatly appreciate it, and I thank you for getting up so early this Saturday morning to meet with me. So, let's jump right in if that's okay with you?

Student H
It is.

Steven Jones
Okay. Um, tell me a little bit about yourself, your background.

Student H
Um, my name is Student H. I am a student at Jackson State University, right now.

I have cheered for fourteen years, played soccer for nine. I have run track, cross country, things like that. I'm very active. I'm the thirteenth child out of fourteen kids. I am a military brat. I think I'd say that already. I'm sorry if I did or did not. I graduated undergrad at Alabama State University. Go Hornets. Now, I’m at Jackson State. Honestly, the only reason I am here is because of homecoming. Homecoming is really big here. I cheered at Alabama State, and when we would play Jackson State at home, we would always sit in the homecoming zone. So, I was always like, oh my God, look at that. So, I said, I'm coming to grad school here. Unfortunately, this year is not going the way I wanted it to because of COVID-19. So yeah.
Steven Jones
Well, hey, that sounds awesome. Did you say you're a military kid?

Student H
Yeah, so my dad he was a marine. He was in the service for thirty-three, thirty-four years or so. I have lived in eight states. I have never been out of country but lived in eight states. My dad and my older siblings, I think they have. Like I said, I'm the thirteenth out of fourteen kids. I'm like really young on the spectrum of oldest youngest my oldest sibling is forty-three, and my youngest is twenty this year. So, it's a very wide age gap.

Steven Jones
Wow. Well, I can relate to the So, age gap between kids and how sometimes that can present an interesting dynamic sometimes. I'm ten years between my So, sister who is the second kid, and my youngest brother just turned fourteen. So you can imagine how that goes.

Student H
Oh, yeah, I definitely can. I was the youngest at one point of time and then my brother came and messed up my entire world, so yeah.

Steven Jones
Got it. So, what is your religious affiliation?

Student H
Um, I was raised Christian although I really don't practice the religion anymore. A lot of things have happened and have been said about, just in general, and I was just like, this really isn't what God wanted. You know, it's like, this isn't what the Bible wants, so apparently this is something that man has said or made popular. So, I would like distance myself away from like the religion. My mom and my dad are not happy about it, but they will be alright.

Steven Jones
So, when you distance yourself from the religion because you don't feel that it shares the same viewpoints as yourself, are you talking about in relation to your sexuality? Or are there different perspectives of the Christian belief that offends you?

Student H
No, it's not only my sexuality. It's just a lot. Um, it's just a lot honestly. So, in my religion, the preachers and people would always be like, how we should love our brothers, and you know, take them as they are or whatever. But when you really think about it, they don't really love their brothers. They will talk about them, their brothers or sisters. They would do bad things to them. I'm like, wait, you suppose to love this person, so how can you do this to them. You're supposed to love them. So that's the reason. And also, my sexuality has something to do with, but it's not the entire reason why. And also, I'm a history major, and being a history major, they will tell you the Bible really isn't one
hundred percent true. And so that's also a reason like, wait, like, is this true? Is this fact? Like, how can I prove this happened? If I can't prove it happened, then I personally won't believe and, you know, it gets spread down.

Steven Jones
So, tell me about your coming out story? What happened? Who was involved?

Student H
So, honestly, I don't have a coming out story. So, I have changed schools eight or nine times so far. Don't mean like, high school and middle school, I mean from state to state. Like, I changed cities, from area to another. I've always been like this free spirited like, you know, like fuck you type person. I'm gonna leave in like a year and a half, so why should I care about what you about me. So, I've really been open most of my life. I don't really know that I have a coming out story. My story, I guess you could say is like, eighth grade, um, I had a boyfriend in eighth grade. Because I went to a white school. So, I really grew up in white environments. So, I was learning that white is right, I guess I could say, so my eighth grade, I had a boyfriend that lasted up to our tenth-grade year of high school. So, it was almost three years, but in between those three years, he would do a lot of mean and dirty things to me. He cheated on me. My tenth-grade year of high school, I got sick and was out for about seventy-five percent of the school year. He didn't try calling me. He didn't try writing me. I was like, this is a bitch ass dude. I lost my virginity in my freshman year of high school. I guess you could say that's my coming out story. I don't know.

Steven Jones
Well describe your relationship with your parents. Are they supportive of your LGBTQ lifestyle?

Student H
Um, so it's ironic. Um, so my dad has dementia. Every now and then I'll have to like be like, oh, yeah, no this is my boyfriend. My dad would be like, oh, you are gay? I'm like, yeah, I am. So, I would have to go through that with him every now and then. My mom, she is kind of, I'm not really sure what to say about my mom. I have introduced her to one of my boyfriends, but I have now had several so I don't about her or the fact that, you know, my relationship life. Our relationship, as far as my mom goes, it's really good. She knows that I'm gay or bisexual or whatever you may say. She supports me, you know, it's like she just wants what's best for me. And I would think the same thing for my dad. He wants what's best for me also. So, I think that our relationship is really good. I think it's better now versus when I was at home with them. Because now I have my own apartment and living my own life. Like, me being up under them, and I was with them, so I guess you can say, I was under their thumb a lot. Because when I was in high school, middle school, elementary school, of course, I was always under their thumb. I never really did anything. I was actually surprised that I had relationships in middle school or high school. Because my parents were so do this, do this, do this, do this, do this, and I was like, okay. But while I was doing it, I would venture off and have my own little fun. So, I guess that
something I would say was a blessing. I don't know. It's like, my parents have always been supportive of me. But at the same time, it's like they've also been a route of the reason of why I'm the way I am. In relationships I'm very passive. I'm very, like, you know, nice and warming. Um, in general, I'm more so the go getter. But in relationships, I'm very soft spoken.

**Steven Jones**

So, if you could change one or two things about your college experience, what would it be and why?

**Student H**

Um, I would definitely say transferring schools. Because I had a lot of fun at Fort Valley State, but they were so close to my house. My parents live in close by - same county, same state. It was like Pearl and Brandon. It was just that close. So, if I could, I wouldn't have transferred from Fort Valley State. Like I said, I had an amazing time at Fort Valley State. I ran track. I cheered. I was in SGA. I just had a really good experience. But the fact that my parents were so close to me, and my grandparents, a lot of people knew them, I couldn't really venture out and be me. So, the first, would have been, I would not have transferred. And my second would be, I don't have a second. My college experience was one of the best experiences of my life. I met two of my very best friends from college. We still have a great relationship. But unfortunately, this year will be the last year that I know anyone from the school because they would have graduated or will be graduating so. So, I will have to make new friends.

**Steven Jones**

Right. So that I'm clear, you first started at Fort Valley State and then transferred to Alabama State?

**Student H**

No. So at first, I started at Fort Valley State. Then I transferred to University of South Carolina, in Columbia, South Carolina. Then I transferred again to Alabama State.

**Steven Jones**

Got it. So, you started at Fort Valley; then went to USC, and then to ASU.

**Student H**

Yes.

**Steven Jones**

Got it. Okay.

Alright. So, what is the campus environment like for a LGBTQ student at Jackson State?
Student H
Actually, I haven't really noticed one. Like I said, I started. So, this past fall, I worked on campus part time and I was also a teacher. And like I said, I did not notice a LGBT atmosphere on campus at all. Mostly what I noticed on campus at Jackson State was people would come into my workspace, or whatever, and like either their friends, personalities, or voices are heard, and I would notice that they were gay. But that's it. There is no club or foundation for the LGBTQ or whatever. I really don't know that Jackson State has one.

Steven Jones
So, what does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging there?

Student H
I don't think anything, honestly. Like so Alabama State, we had two or three clubs that catered to the LGBTQ community on campus, but at Jackson State, I have not noticed any clubs, any activities, any events or anything that happens on this campus that cater to the LGBTQ people. But I think it's mostly because it's like we are in the South and the LGBTQ world in the South especially, and also because we are at an HBCU, I think it may take a while to establish or get off the ground. I mean it's sad, but this is the type of thing that has to happen in order for you know, things to like really pick up.

Steven Jones
Okay. So, what is the ideal HBCU experience and does Jackson State meet those qualifications?

Student H
For me personally?

Steven Jones
Yes.

Student H
Um, I don't know. I don't personally have any HBCU experiences. So, the way I have grown up, and the way the real world is, is totally different things. It's like, so I really don't think I have any expectations for college in general. Whether it's a PWI or HBCU, I don't have any expectation for college. Um, but as far as Jackson State goes, right now, it's like, it's kind of living up to the hype. As far as it goes with the band, activities, the clubs, Greek organizations and things like that. It does live up to the hype.

Um, but wait, I'm sorry, what was the question again?

Steven Jones
So, what is the ideal HBCU experience to you and does Jackson State meet those qualifications?
Student H
Oh, yeah. I'm sorry. So yes, Jackson State meets my qualifications as a perfect HBCU experience. But there again, Alabama State and Fort Valley State did also. I would always think about games, step shows, parties, you know, and other fun activities. Jackson State definitely has the fun parts of what I would want for my college experience.

Steven Jones
Okay.

What LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus, and what LGBTQ resources, if any, would you recommend establishing or implementing on campus?

Student H
So again, I don't think there are any on campus. If they are, they are not really talked about a lot or you don't know they are on campus. So, at Alabama State, and I'm sorry because I have to go back there since I graduated undergrad there. They recently started a club called, URGE. I forgot the name of the club but it was about uniting and respecting everyone. I would also introduce a LGBTQ society. Because the world needs people who are not afraid to speak up.

Steven Jones
So, Jackson State doesn't have to your knowledge, a LGBTQ Learning Resource Center or safe spaces or a Gay Straight Alliance or any of those type of resources?

Student H
Not my knowledge.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So, thinking back to when you first decided to attend an HBCU, and more so focusing on Jackson State, when you first decided to attend Jackson State, and given your lived experience on the campus now. Did you make the right choice in attending Jackson State for your grad studies?

Student H
I think so because like I said, the real why I chose Jackson State was because of homecoming. I really didn't know anything about grad school other than the fact that you have to go to classes. The homecoming experience is the reason I decided to come to Jackson State, and that has not lived up to what I wanted it to be because the pandemic. I could have went to Alabama State for grad school too, but I wanted to get away and learn something new. Meet new people. Overall, my experience at Jackson State has been positive.
Steven Jones
Awesome. So, describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students in Jackson State.

Student H
I would think that one professor is gay. He is really nice. He is passionate about his studies. It's very rare when I say, I want to be like you. So, you know that this person has a very big impact on my personal life. So, I only know one on campus. I don't know of any other staff on campus that are LGBTQ.

Steven Jones
So, in looking at that question again, I want to know what you think about faculty and staff in general. They don't necessarily have to be gay, but they can be heterosexuals. But what about their support? Do you feel like there's a level of support from faculty and staff for LGBTQ students there?

Student H
Oh, okay. So, I'm sorry, I misinterpreted the question the first time. Um, so me personally, um. I just don't know. So, this semester I have two teachers who are really supportive. They are there for me when I need them. No matter what, they are there for me. But in general, I never have spoke to them about my personal life. We really just talk about the studies and keep it moving. So, like I said, I have two professors this semester who are supportive. And one of them is my advisor. So, my paper for grad school, I am going to write about the black experience of being LGBTQ. My advisor thought it was a great topic, and he told me that if I needed anything to let him know.

Steven Jones
Good. That's awesome. That's awesome. So, how successful is your institution in communicating available LGBTQ resources to LGBTQ students?

Student H
Not at all. I haven't got any emails or seen any posters or flyers about LGBTQ people in general. I don't think Jackson State has any LGBTQ alliances or clubs or anything like that. So, I don't think that's available to us. I think that if you go to school at Jackson State, we literally just go to school.

Steven Jones
So, if you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why?

Student H
An experience, no, that's the word, an experience. Because I have had so many experiences. They have all either taught me something or showed me something. They have made me open my mind up, whether positive or negative. It has definitely been an experience.
Steven Jones
Would you recommend an HBCU to other perspective LGBTQ students? Why or why not?

Student H
Honestly, I would. Um, and it's not because it's like, it's not because you're like, you're LGBTQ. It's more so about the experience. In the real world, you never know whether people will like or not. And you're going to a HBCU is definitely like the one place where you will know whether or not people like you. At the HBCU is like he's more of a like, okay, you're cool. You are my friend, or it's like the get away from me. So that's why I would personally say you should go to an HBCU.

Steven Jones
So, what can Jackson State do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students?

Student H
They just need to make a safe space. It doesn't have to be a really big space. It just needs to be a space where we can go if anything happens, or something goes wrong with you personally, like, it doesn't matter. Like, it doesn't matter whether it's sexuality wise, or class wise or personality wise. It's just a safe space. It's a space where you know you can come and talk and you don't have to worry about anything else.

Steven Jones
So, tell me about your experience interacting with heterosexual students on campus. Have you had a good experience or bad experience?

Student H
So, I'm really nice. So, I would think those have all been good experience. Because I was raised to be nice and show compassion to everyone. So, I would think they have all be positive and good. Like I said, I had a job on campus last semester and I would think that those experiences working with people every day was good experiences. Like, I don't think there were any problems.

Steven Jones
So, tell me how the institution ensures that LGBTQ students are equally represented and supported on campus? I know we talked about clubs and organizations, but what are other ways that you think you can be supported at Jackson State? Is that happening at Jackson State? Are you equally supported?

Student H
I don't think so. Because there's really nowhere we can go and talk about things that are happening with us. A place where it is private and not be talked about by anyone else. And as far as what can be offered, I really don't know because out of three schools I have gone to, only one school had a club or space for people to come into and be themselves.
So, I really don't know what Jackson State can offer other than a safe space. And when I say a safe space like, I am saying get a counselor. Get someone who can legit help people. I'm not sure if people know if, but LGBTQ people have very high suicide rate. And I'm not saying that people don't understand us, I'm saying that because a lot of, especially in the black community, they don't accept us. You know, they say, well that's against God or that's this, that, and the third, and I'm like wait, God said to love everyone, but you don't love me. So, how does this work out. I'm confused. And that's part of the reason I don't really follow religion anymore. Because they say one thing and do something else. I'm like you can't follow God or love Jesus and not love and support me because I'm one way.

**Steven Jones**

So, talk a little about your experience of being gay in the black community.

**Student H**

So, in high school, I went from a predominantly white high school to a predominantly black high school. It was like night and day. Literally, it was night and day. Because at the white school, I cheered, I was in color guard, I did SGA. But when I went to the black school, I wanted to do the exact same things, but I couldn't because either it's a girl thing, or you can do this because of this, that, and the third. I was like wait, I could do this at the other school, I'm confused. So that's one experience. Then it's like, black people in general is like, they always want to make it seem like you know, like the world is about to end because it's more gay people coming out. I'm like, that's not true. Gay people have been here. You just don't know about it because there's a lot of athletes that are actually gay, but they don't tell their personal business because they want their jobs. So, I guess I can say that it's a fine-tooth comb where you can't have your success and your popularity and still be yourself. You can't have both of them. Are you popular and success or you can be yourself, because you can't do both? You really can't be both. For example, like Frank Ocean, he can because he is Frank Ocean, but let's say athletes or Odell Beckham, Jr. I'm not saying he is gay but I'm just saying people like him. He can't say, oh yeah, I'm gay and still be supported in the NFL community. Although I cannot lie and say that white people are the most sympathetic, they really aren't. They may not like you but they won't tell you to your face.

**Steven Jones**

Have you ever witnessed or been a victim to homophobic acts on campus?

**Student H**

Um, I have not. Um, but I think that is because I don't live on campus. I have my own apartment. I would hope that is one of the reasons why. Although, I don't hope for gay bashing or bashing in general to anyone. But I would say that that's probably the big reason why because Jackson State is legit, like the heart of the ghetto. And the campus is open so people can like, legit walk on campus and do anything. It would only be reported if it's a camera. So, I guess that's one reason why I have been a victim or seen anything like that. I'm not sure.
Steven Jones
So how successful are instructors and professors in preventing homophobic acts within the classroom?

Student H
I don't think they're successful at all. Honestly, I don't even think they try. So last summer, I was in a Spanish class and like, a guy was saying, "oh, that's gay". He wasn't talking to me, but I was like, "what's gay about it? You can't say it is gay if you don't really know what gay is unless you are gay, then I can really say anything." The teacher just laughed it off. I was like, you're not going to say anything?" That's not something anyone should just be able to say. Like, you can't say that that's gay, if you don't know what gay is. So, I mean, I wasn't distraught or anything. I was just like, this bitch here. She don't know what the fuck she is talking about, because like, she didn't say anything and like, it just wasn't a comfortable situation for me personally.

Steven Jones
So, what steps do this institution take to ensure campus safety for all students?

Student H
Um, honestly, I really don't know. Because since I've been at Jackson State nothing really bad has happened on campus, so I don't really think that either the community itself is waking up, or the campus safety is on their jobs. So, I really don't know. I mean, well, hopefully it's both. But I know it's not, unfortunately. So, I would just say that people are minding their business more often than they did before.

Steven Jones
So, is there anything else that you would like to add? Anything else you would like to say? Anything else you would like for the higher education world to know about HBCUs and LGBTQ students? How we can better serve this population of students?

Student H
I would just say that HBCUs in general need to ensure that we do have a voice, and that our voice are actually heard. And make sure you go and vote. Honestly, voting is very important right now. And also, because people like legit died for everyone to get the right to vote, so you really should go and vote. And just like, for Briana Taylor vote. So, like you really should go. And also like it just for Briana Taylor Elijah McClain because, you know, those are two very important people and they did not deserve to die.

Steven Jones
Well, thank you so much. I greatly appreciate your time and your participation. This was very helpful. I wish you the very best of luck in your graduate studies at Jackson State and take care of yourself.

Have a good day.
Student H
You too, bye.

Steven Jones
Bye, bye.
Student I – Interview Transcript
Interview Date: Friday, August 21, 2020 at 1:00 P.M.

Steven Jones
Hello, how are you?

Student I
Hey, man? How are you?

Steven Jones
I'm good. I'm good. How are things going for a Friday?

Student I
Ah, it's a Friday.

Steven Jones
I hear you.

Student I
So, what's going on, doc?

Steven Jones
Well, I want to get right to the point because I know from our initial conversation that you have a lot to say. So, let's get start if that's okay. I would like to start with you telling me a little about yourself.

Student I
So, let me start with my education. Okay. I went to an all-white school from in the Delta from kindergarten all the way up to 12th grade. I graduated from Belhaven. And then I felt like I didn't know myself. I worked in politics in Mississippi. My cousins are in politics. We care a lot about it. I was an intern for Musgrove. I interned for him and everything. But anyway, point matter, I went to Belhaven and graduated. I felt like I didn't know myself. I went to Jackson State for the first time as a political science student under Dr. Mary Coleman.

So, it's my first experience with an HBCU. I was actually recruited to come to Jackson State because I had worked in politics and met Dr. Leslie Macklemore. So that was a wonderful experience; however, I wasn't serious. You know, I am going to be honest. I wasn't. Made it from there and got accepted to be a Presidential Management intern under Bush. I was part of that cadre of people that came in and changed to Presidential Management fellow because of the Monica Lewinsky scandal. So, then I took an assignment in Chicago, and worked for the Office of Personnel Management for over ten and a half years in HR as an auditor. So basically, I look at the fine details of life and tear
your ass up. That's just who I am. With that being said, I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to make a change. I wanted to make a change and politics just was not feeding my spirit. So long story short, I got out. Then I went to Mississippi College and obtained a degree in Marriage and Family Counseling under Dr. Sutherland. Then I left there and it was hard to find a clinical site to do counseling, to go ahead and you know, get the hours and clinical internships that we have to fulfill the degree requirement. So, I decided to enroll back into Jackson State again. Well, before I did that, I went to Ole Miss, and I tried to get into their Doctorate of Health Administration program. My father is not a fan of HBCUs considering my first experience, but I was like you're not paying for this, I am. So, I went back there. I got into the School of Public Health program and got into the health policy management track.

Steven Jones
Wow. So, what led to your decision to attend an HBCU? Was it just because of the major or was it something personal that resulted in you attending an HBCU?

Student I
It was both. I tried Tougaloo after I graduated from XXXXXX School in XXXXXX. I couldn't do it. I could do it but I had to, but I just wasn't true to who I am. And that's such a small concentrated environment that I met a girl on campus. Beautiful girl, had a boyfriend. I played basketball. I was always you know, entrepreneurship, came from a family of entrepreneurs and word got out that I was gay.

And so, they stole my clothes, my trifling as a roommate. Yeah, it was just a lot. My RA said I was a drug dealer. But I was going home every weekend working at merry go round. You know, I'm upper middle class. My family, we've had a company for over ninety years. So, I mean, we have we have a different type of lifestyles, no big deal. And so, I just gave up on the HBCU at that moment. I was like, I'm the fuck out of here. Plus, I'm not used to green frogs and the conditions of the living environment was horrible. I couldn't take it. I got the hell out of there. My GPA was 1.5 because I was drinking cisco on the yard, trying to fit in. I didn't know how to fit into black culture. That bothered me. It did. It really did something to me, bad. I didn't know how to fix it. So, I went back to Belhaven on a scholarship. I am a tennis girl, so I went back to Belhaven on a tennis scholarship. So, when I got a chance to do it again, I was working in politics. I was doing the XXXXXXX campaign when he ran against XXXXXX. My dad hated me doing that job. He said, I'll pay you to go back to school. And I said, well, damn, that's great. That's what I did. That's how I ended up. I said, but I got to go where I want to go. He wanted me to go Ole Miss. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to be a lawyer, but nah, that ain't happening either. So, I went to Jackson State, majoring in political science. I met Dr. Macklemore out somewhere. I was constantly speaking all over the place. He came up and he was like, have you thought about school, and I'm like, I just graduated. And he said, what about Jackson State? He offered me a scholarship. I was too stupid to understand the opportunity before me. I was party and hanging out. The girl in class sending me notes wanting to talk to me. Because at that time, I was working for the Secretary of State's office in the corporation’s division for like two and a half years, and I
Just got out but lost the scholarship part of you know, pay attention to what you're doing. You're young and you cute, but it ain't going to last forever. You know, so um I'm glad I made that decision.

**Steven Jones**
Wow.

Well, shifting gears just a little bit given that we kind of opened it in discussion about LGBTQ. Tell me about your coming out story.

**Student I**
Like that crazy. I'm going to tie spirituality into this as well. I am going to give you two for the price of one. Um, so I was raised Baptist. My father's a deacon, head deacon in the church. And, um, I've always been tomboyish from the day I was born. You know, I don't consider myself a stud. I just consider myself a woman who love women, more android than anything, but I'm not really into the labels, you know, but I don't date masculine women. I'll tell you that. I will date a little tomboyish-type of chick, but not masculine. That's not my type.

So, I knew at five I was different. Yeah, cuz I like boobs and I was like; this is crazy. I could remember at five, you know. And my mom left my dad when I was five, so I'm from a divorced home, and my grandmother was about sixty years my senior, I mean forty or fifty years my senior. And so, my coming out story was, I was fifteen when I met my first lover, Michelle. She was twenty-four.

So, it's not so much that in the Delta, or anywhere really in black culture, we don't really come out. Things just happen. Let's put it like that. And so, I think that at seventeen, I remember my aunt, one of my daddy's sisters, because they were around, they were piece of work, it was two of them in general. One died now, and one is still alive. She use to call me, funny. With your funny self. And I said, if I'm funny your husband is too. Because he was funny too.

I've always been the black sheep, but I've always been the wise one. And I was my grandmother's favorite one. It pissed everyone off, you know. And so, my so I took the opportunity to leave Mississippi when things didn't go right with the job with Musgrove. I was like, you know, fuck it. I'm out of here. I went to Chicago. My goal was to go to the National Cancer Institute where I had been offered my first position, but my grandmother didn't agree. So, I had to go to Chicago with my other crazy ass aunt. And so, with that being said, I did not come out formally. And I still, to some degree haven't come out officially to my family, but I had a nervous breakdown in 2006 as a result of the work that I did in the government and the stress, and I was in nightclubs to four or five in the morning flying all over the country. And you know, my dad talked to the psychiatrists and psychologists basically say, you know, your daughter is bipolar. And she is under a lot of stress, you know, and part of stress is she's gay. Do you know my dad has never spoken word about it? Yeah, I hear from people that he cried about it. He cries about it
now. But I refuse Steven, to live my life for somebody else. I've done it all my life literally to 34 years old when I had to break down. Yeah. He sees my lover, my girlfriend, and he's cordial. He is, but it just takes him fast, but I don't give a shit. He has done whatever he wanted to do. He has ignored whatever he has wanted to do and masked it with money all my life, and I just I don't want to do that anymore. I want to live an authentic life, you know.

Steven Jones
Yeah. Well that was going to be my next question, to describe your relationship with your parents. Are they supportive of your lifestyle? And I heard you say that your mom left your dad when you were around five years old.

Student I
Yeah, but she had her. So, see if I had to look back now. You know my mother was not your traditional Southern woman. She graduated with a Master's from Liberal Force and she was working on her, Thad Cochran sent her to school for free. She's a black Republican. Some shit I don't even get. I don't even understand where we are as black people in any of this political race at this point for a lot of reasons. But so, her thing was, you're gonna get blown up in the in the gay club. And so, um, when Pulse happened, I was like, damn, you remember? I was like, wow. She passed away in 2005. Which is a precipitating event that led to the breakdown. Because just because we bury people, we don't mean we bury feelings and emotions.

Steven Jones
Yeah. It takes a long time and sometimes it never leaves.

Student I
Yeah, it never leaves. Abandonment never leaves, stuff never leaves, but you keep trying to work on it. But my mother, at the end before she died, I had the opportunity to talk about validation with her. I said, you know, all these years of wanting you to validate me. God validates me. I said, I really don't call him God. I just say my higher power. So, my parents, my dad's a Mason. He doesn't even talk about it. This is how a little creepy. He doesn't like the new form of how people are so Eastern star and you know, he's like that's not what this was about. This is not a sorority or fraternity. And so was my grandfather a Freemen, and yeah, he and I it's the craziest thing. So, the little church I go to, I don't know why they ask me to speak at missionary events and stuff like that. Who would invite me to speak? I mean, cuz you know, I don't think like you think. And I challenge the brainwashing that religion has done, I'm spiritual. I'm not religious because I don't. If I innately I should not have to go to church every Sunday, like a sick saint to get fixed, at some point, you change your behavior or you adapt principles. Love your neighbor as yourself is your most. It is the highest form. In that love means acceptance of other people. I challenge one of my cousin's. He has a book coming out. I didn't like the boy and I had never met that boy, but I'm like. His dad was a Baptist minister, and he was too. They were fire and brimstone on gay people. How are you
gonna be fire and brimstone on gay people when you have a gay daughter, me, and three other cousins that were gay? I didn't get that. So, one thing my cousin asked me to do was to meet his son, he ended up dying, okay. It was just out of nowhere, and I met his son and I said, okay, I'm gonna stretch my mind on this shit because I don't know how this is going to go, you know? But I talked to him and in my conversation, I was able to let down the defense and hear what he said. But I also challenged his thoughts. And do you know he ended up marrying his sister to her first wife? Do you know that he is now an advocate of all rights including GLBT rights? I mean, so, you know, what if I had missed that opportunity to just sit with my cousin and meet him where he was, and he met me where I was right, you know?

Steven Jones  
Right. Wow. Yeah.

So, talk to me a little bit about Jackson State. If you could change one or two things about your college experience, what would it have been and why?

Student I  
Ethics and integrity,

Ethics because, let me start with integrity first because I think it blends together, but let me start with integrity. People bring themselves to the classroom and what I've heard a lot of my teachers say is, I got mine now you got to get yours. And when you graduate from Jackson State, or I think, any HBCU but definitely Jackson State University, they beat the shit out of you. Even the first time I got out of Jackson State with my situation with Dr. Coleman, when I got to the federal government, I had to file a discrimination lawsuit case I was ready. Because I have fought so hard at every level. Um, so integrity is one of those things that college has struggled with, from Dr. Myers, and that's at the higher level. When we talk about financial abuse, disrespect. Just gut bucket, no care, no concern. Even down to the staff. I mean, you go to the business office to pay your money and they act like, what the fuck you want? If I don't pay you, your salary depends on this. I'm not trying to be purged. It's like the things that they could systemically and systematically do to improve that school, they won't. And a lot of it is, that a lot of the institutional knowledge, that use to be a part of the university, where they cared about their students in a whole different degree, has left. So, when you have people that know how to do, lead a system of people that have just gotten by, then all you have are just people that get by, and then they get their buddies in there and they abuse the system. At what point does that not do what it needs to do? Why can't we get beyond ourselves? Does that make sense? Like what should be paramount, is not. And it is almost like, you have to know someone to get your shit done around there. I mean, thank God, you know, XXXXX was in the IRB. Thank God, I'm gonna be real with you. Thank God that Dr. Legit was on my committee, because these people were not trying to help me get nowhere. Not just me, I mean, I've had other people in my cohort that just tanked.
Steven Jones
Oh, what is the campus environment like for LGBTQ student?

Student I
So, I will give you master-level, and then I will give you doctorate level. Because you have to understand that this is like fourteen years. Yeah. So, when I was first there back with my first master's degree, you know how you, I wasn't super out but people knew, I was like the girl with the long pretty hair. You don't look like these other people, a feminine me and or whatever. The gay community itself has changed, okay? Fourteen years ago, we were not as out as we are now. These kid now are like, we are going to do whatever it takes. We don't have to blend in. We don't have to fit. Fuck y'all. We are going to cuss you out because you ain't doing enough. I don't get that because me, I care about my paper every day of my life. I'm going to be honest with you. I'm trying to chill. I'm trying to have a beautiful relationship. I'm trying to raise my little puppy that we just got the other day. And punking ain't my lifestyle. Being gay is not a lifestyle for me. Being gay is who I am.

So, then it seemed like we had some decorum. And so, because we had some decorum, yeah, you said has football boys sleeping with the feminine man and all that, but it was happening at night and nobody really knew. You know, or we knew, but we didn't say and so everybody kind of played nice, so to speak. But then gay became cool, or gay became bad, and now you got all this going on on campus. So, you literally, when I look at the Iota men, you know, that fraternity thing that I didn't know was a fraternity until I came back this time? Yeah, they're gay. They're all gay. I mean, literally, like, all gay. And I'm like, what the fuck is this? You know, like, I really was like, what the fuck is this? And so, I said, so is this, who we are? I didn't get it. So, when you walk on campus, it's a beautiful campus. They have done a great job with Jackson State. I have to be honest with you, but everybody is so gone with the wind. Like, if I sleep with a woman today, I sleep with a woman today. You still have a lot of abuse, I think, in same sex relationships. I think you have a lot of people with depression on campus. I think we still have a lot of people trying to figure out who they are, and I'm I'll tell you what they did, which I could have literally like, crazy, okay? They had a young man that committed suicide. Now, I don't know the ins and outs of it. But I was privy to an opportunity to see the VP of Student Life. They had mandatory meetings around this, okay. So, if you didn't show up to this meeting, then you got bing with something. I don't know what it was. So, they all stood around and purple t shirts and I said, you can talk to me. None of these people are therapists. Where is the Natasha Norman Center? Because they are the counselors, right? Mental health is real. GLBT people, they have large levels of mental health concerns because of acceptance. And some of them do have comorbidities and some of them are gender dysphoria. I just didn't understand why HBCUs don't embrace something different. They're rigid in their thinking. It's almost like they move the Baptist church into the school, or the AME church into the school. You feel me, because those are people that go to those churches and then they come to work. And then they're over your children. And then we are children voice problems about being different or being you know, whatever. They don't have any outlet; they don't have any place to go. So,
when XXXXX created Spectrum, so that's why to me that school ethically does not operate in a manner that is really conducive for the students at times.

**Steven Jones**
Well, here's a two-fold question for you. What does institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging on campus? And what is the ideal HBCU experience and does your chosen HBCU meet those qualifications?

**Student I**
What has a HBCU done? Nothing that I've seen, but I'm not on campus a lot. But I do know we have GLBT students within our program in the School of XXXXXXX and we don't recognize Gay Pride or anything. We recognize XXXXXX. We so recognize XXXXX and XXXXXX. We recognize all that, but we don't do Pride. No, no. Now, the main campus might. I don't get an email about it. They email you about every damn thing else, but no. Because to them, to the powers that be, they see that as a sign of endorsement. And not just, hey, thank you for your contributions. The list goes on, of people that have done wonderful contributions from the GLBT community. Yeah, I'm not sure. Other than XXXXX's group do. I really don't even know what it does. I know it was a grant written, but I'm not sure what they do. And I'm not sure what they have done to increase their visibility or what they have done to assimilate to some degree, because you need to be. You don't need to be polarized in any university, in any body. It needs to be 360. It's not going to be harmonious all the time, but you do need to assimilate to a degree to make sure that you’re heard, seen, and policies can be placed in position to help your organization, you know. But nah, I going to be honest, I don't know what they do.

**Steven Jones**
Tell me what you think is the ideal HBCU experience, and does Jackson State meet those qualifications?

**Student I**
Okay, let me start backwards. Does Jackson State meet those qualifications? No. The ideal experience is one that's not riddled with scandal every week. Every two, three weeks, every couple of months, every year, you know. Down to even crime on campus, you know, where we have had people, a guy shot. But you know, they have always labeled Jackson State. If anything, happen downtown, close to the campus, it happened on Jackson State campus, and that's annoying and that's not good. You know, systemically, we have to have strong leadership. I don't think that school has had that for ten years or more. Someone who really cared about students. Dr. Mason was all in our shit. He was walking across campus. He was talking to us, and he wasn't perfect, but he wasn't the shit we have had the last ten years. I can tell you that. We need institutional knowledge of functions. We need to update our systems. You know, our protocols, our procedures. The faculty and staff that they hired needs to be of higher quality. Just because you're a doctor does not mean you are smart. Just because you're a doctor, does not mean that you know how to facilitate, how to run a department, or how to hire or manage people. Interpersonal effectiveness is killing Jackson State University. I'm gonna
be honest with you. Because we have this head nigger in charge type of mentality. I'm the head nigger in charge, but honey, you are a part of a system. And so, there's no "I "in team. I don't understand why African American people in positions of power cannot understand that they cannot do what white people do and still come out on top. You can't go to Clinton Mississippi and get an escort. Clinton out of all places and beat a charge. Some shit we just can't do. And our ethics have always been called into question. Which ties back to our religion. How strong is our religion? That's a good question. Because every time you saw that little short man who just got his ass caught in Clinton, oh, God is this. That's all, man you go back and look at every clip. You'd be like, what the hell? I mean, he made me sick. I was sick of that little man.

Steven Jones
So, here's a couple things, um, resources. And I know you, you say that you're not really on the main campus a lot. So, based on what you do know, what LGBTQ resources are available on campus, and what resources if any, would you recommend establishing or implementing on campus?

Student I
So, the campus that I am on, which is the Jackson Medical Mall, just so you know that. There were no resources there. There weren’t hardly no resources like, the library. I mean, we got one, but hell, it wasn't open half the time. But they have a wonderful thing. Being in the Jackson Medical Mall, there's a place called Cross Roads. Where you can get your HIV testing and different stuff like that. I don't know, to the extension of what Crossroads does outside of just testing, but at least they were in a proximity where if somebody was really needing something, they could walk literally five minutes and find something. But the Main Campus, I don’t see anything. I don't know even how established the counselors are at Latasha Norman, because those are clinical interns, students. And their faculty, I'm just gonna be honest with you in the program, some of them are. Even though we all have APA code of ethics, they have an antiquated way of handling that, and they're not equipped to some degree. What they need to do is create a safe place. Whether they establish a suicide hotline. Whether they establish a safe place in regards, it doesn't have to be suicide, but it can just be like, are you having conflict? You know, would you like to come in and meet with our counselor? Oftentimes, they don't want that to be people that are in a school setting, that they're gonna walk across the street and see, you know. Some people are very closeted about their sexuality, and you have to allow for those people as well. And people don't want to be labeled, you know. So, another thing I would do would be, um, instead of pointedly doing things for people that are different or not within the system that they're in, you know, like, I'm different. I'm an outlier is what I call it. Instead of having a pointed conversation about same gender love, you could do like a speakeasy about it. A speakeasy where you invite people to come in. It doesn't have to come from spectrum. Because domestic violence is high in same sex community. So why not include some of the verbiage, or understand the language enough, or understand the struggle enough, to not make it so awkward? Like it's a stigma or taboo, you know. Um, I would say to them as well, and this is something that is going to bite them in the ass too. You have people that are trans-dressing, and a lot of
them have made the decision to do the transformation from one gender to the next. You have to have a space, you cannot discriminate. You receive federal funds, you cannot discriminate. I don't give a damn what you say. They do not have the means to do that.

You know how we have an Honors dorm?

**Steven Jones**
Yeah.

**Student I**
So, they need to do a lot, and I'm not so sure where they are with their policies on that.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so then thinking back to when you first decided to attend an HBCU, and given your live experiences now being on the campus as an LGBTQ student? Did you make the right choice to attend Jackson State?

**Student I**
Yeah, I still say yes.

**Steven Jones**
Okay.

**Student I**
I still say yes, because I think, even if I look at the white institutions that I've attended, Belhaven college got their first African American Student in 1985. I graduated from there in 1996. I enrolled there in 1993. And they had issues, don't kid yourself. They didn't make it easy. There's struggle wherever you go. When you have a kamikaze of people there. Mixed fruit bowl approach. You're going to have struggle. You're going to have strife. Even when I went to MC, Dr. Sutherland asked me, what do I think I'm gonna be able to do, looking like I look. And then he asked me, how does it feel with all these women that just love to be in your face. I don't know. Women just talk to me. I'm easy to talk to. I'm not trying to look at them no kind of way. I told him it didn't bother me, because I know my limits but I'm glad to know it bothers you. So, you got a problem wherever you go. But yes, I learned a lot from JSU. I would not be as astute in African American history as I am now and politics, and I met some amazing students.

**Steven Jones**
Well, if you could use one word to describe your college experience, what would it be and why?

**Student I**
Complexity. If not complexity, bureaucracy, just pick one. One or the other.
Steven Jones
Well, how often? Well, actually you kind of answered this question already when I asked about different LGBTQ related activities and things being offered on campus, and you kind of said, you didn't know of any. So how do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus? What's your thoughts on that?

Student I
That's a funny question. We knew faculty that were gay, but they never verbalize it. If people could just be free to be who they are, then we would just be free to tell them. Jackson State is so crazy. I don't know if they would even hire someone knowing they are gay. But it's so weird when we talk about gay faculty, because we know they're gay. But I don't think they publicize their gayness to other people.

Steven Jones
Why do you think that is, that they are no so open?

Student I
Like they can't be. I don't feel like that would be acceptable at all. We are not accepting culture wise.

Steven Jones
What do you mean, who do you mean?

Student I
We as African Americans, predominantly African Americans. Then you also have to understand to, you have other cultures that teach at Jackson State University, like my Nigerian friends. They definitely don't do homosexuality at all. Like off with your head kind of crazy. Also, you have a lot of Muslim. Muslim are religious background type people and they definitely don't do gay.

Steven Jones
Tell me what does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

Student I
When all of your standards, all of your procedures, all your policies they speak to different diverse backgrounds, sexual. When we talk about at the universities, it would be your sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, you would even have to throw in reasonable accommodations in there. Because that's a disability and those are things you must adhere to. When all those things are looked at from a fair and equitable type of manner from the top to the lowest, where the respect is and understood by all. Not misinterpreted by faculty. No, no, you shouldn't misinterpret that. Because misinterpret that could give you a lawsuit that you can never pay back. You know, so people want to misinterpret a lot. Faculty needs extensive training at Jackson State, and even though they do that Title IX training, that's bullshit. These people need to actually be in simulated. Sit down, you play the gay person. Role playing, stuff we do in therapy. I mean, they need to feel how it
feels. Because a lot of people, you can click. Let me tell you, click click. professor had me take his Title IX.

**Steven Jones**  
So, you did his title nine training for him? Wow.

**Student I**  
And that happens with a lot of people. He ain't the only one. I don't have time for this. I got to teach.

**Steven Jones**  
Wow. So, based on what you just provided, and thinking back on your experiences as a LGBTQ student there at Jackson State, and your lived experiences there, would you recommend Jackson State to other perspective LGBTQ students? Why or why not?

**Student I**  
What portion? What portion? The university in general?

**Steven Jones**  
Yeah, the University in general. If I was looking to attend an HBCU, would you recommend Jackson State to me knowing that I'm a gay student based on your experience as a gay student there? Would it be the right choice for me? Would you recommend it me?

**Student I**  
It depends on how thick your skin is. Um, if you're timid, if you won't hold people to a standard, that you must respect me as I respect you. If you can't do that, I will say no. If you're not a type of person who's on top of your business in the sense that you're gonna make sure that the business office gives you this twelve-hundred-dollar check that they've been holding for a whole year, because you making sure you're accounting and your books are done. If you are not advocating for self, no, don't go to Jackson State. If you want to study hard, put forth the effort, because they are only going to give you a limited amount. I took a course, and we only did three chapters the entire semester. I'm like what the fuck. Why I'm going to buy a book, you know. You have to self-teach yourself there in the experiences that I have. Now, political science, they taught my ass to death, but that was fourteen years ago. It was just a different climate. You were going to learn or you were going to get the hell out of there.

**Steven Jones**  
So, what steps do the institution take to ensure campus safety for all students?

**Student I**  
They are horrible at this. They are horrible at this. They're better at this where my location is at Jackson Medical Mall because the area is so concentrated and we take care of that wing. Okay. So, they were great at that. I got to give it to the Jackson Medical
Mall. That's a whole different entity. On campus, they got these little people out in those little security houses. Very rarely do you see people walking on campus as campus security. I've been over there a couple times, and I was amazed that I'm like, there's a whole lot of people but no campus security. But they secure the hell out of the President. You have to show ID on the seventh floor. You have to show ID to go into the Tower.

Steven Jones
Is there anything else that you would like to add in reference to your experience as a student at Jackson State. I know we spoke a little on religion, I guess, I would like you to recap a little on that, in terms of what your thoughts are, in reference to African American church and homosexuality. And especially given that you come from a Baptist background. How was that growing up as a Baptist kid in the Baptist church in the South? At a Southern Baptist Church and being gay?

Student I
Ah, it was kind of, I know, I talked to you a little bit about dissociative identity and I had to deny myself to perpetuate my family standard, middle class, well respected in church, and granddad join the church, got on the Mormons bench and all that stuff. I'm like woo, this is a lot. Even when given my life to XXXXXxt, I still knew something was different. You know, I knew that this freedom that I was supposed to feel by being protected by something larger than me. I didn't feel that, you know. And so, I did the vacation bible schools, won the Bible Bowls, did out all. I could preach it all to you, man. Twenty-three Psalms was my thing. And I kept praying the gay away, so to speak. Because I didn't even know what it was. I just knew I felt different. My best friend was gay and I got in trouble in the sixth grade for looking under the girls’ dresses at a Catholic school. So, my dad always knew, you know, it was never something that they didn't know. I would teach the Sunday school. So, I mean, even like six, seven years old Deacon McCullum. This old guy, he would say, you're such a good speaker. Why don't you give the high points of the lesson? Like how am I gonna do it? You know, I can only do it through my eyes which are different, but I did it. I tried and a precipitating event was my mother dying, but also me going to Rock of Ages Baptist Church in XXXXX, XXXXXXX and trying once again to fit into the box of religion. And that was when Bush was running and Adam and Steve was on his recorder over and over again. That shit made me sick. Like I was in church, and I can remember walking out to church and throwing up.

Steven Jones
Well, hey, I want to wish you the very best. Thank you again for your participation. I greatly appreciate it.

Student I
Hey, go ahead and write that Chapter Four and Five, you are ready.

Steven Jones
Thank you.
Student I
Hey, no problem, man. Take care.
Student J – Interview Transcript
Interview Date: Friday, August 21, 2020 at 3:00 P.M.

Steven Jones
Good morning, Student J. How are you? Thank you again for your willingness to participate in my study. I greatly appreciate it, and I don't want to take up too much of your Sunday morning. So, if you're ready, we'll go ahead and get started.

Student J
Okay, let me go get my charger.

Steven Jones
Okay, just let me know when you are ready.

Student J
Okay, I'm ready.

Steven Jones
Okay, so just a few how housekeeping things. I want this to be a conversation. I don't want you to feel like you're just put on the spot. I rather for it to be just a normal conversation between you and I about your experience Coahoma. So, tell me a little about yourself.

Student J
Personally, I do have my carpentry degree. Um, I'm twenty years old. I'm the baby on my mom's side, and I am interested in girls also. That's mainly a little about me briefly.

Steven Jones
Okay, tell me about your religious affiliation. Are you Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal? What's your religious affiliation?

Student J
I grew up as a Seventh Day Adventist. Which we're required to, you know, go to church on Saturdays. But as I got older, you know, I started to attend different churches like, I starting to go to church on Sundays and stuff. Um, as I got older, but as I got more older, I mean, I just attend church when churches are open and stuff like that which is on Sundays actually.

Steven Jones
Gotcha. So, what led to your decision to attend Coahoma, an HBCU?
Student J
Actually, I actually was a walk-on to sports. If it wasn't for me playing sports, I would have never been at Coahoma. But I had help in high school, you know, that knew people and had connections and stuff for me to actually attend Coahoma. So, since that was my only choice and I was able to play sports, and that was something that I like to do, I actually, you know, um, I decided to go there since I didn't have to pay out of pocket or anything like that. So, it was just a free scholarship or free toll for me to actually go to Coahoma.

Steven Jones
So, what is your major and classification at Coahoma?

Student J
Well, my first two year, I was able to graduate with my degree in residential carpentry. I graduated a second time with a certificate, but since the virus came, I was able to go back. So, I went back to do general studies.

Steven Jones
So, currently you are general studies major?

Student J
Yes, I'm currently a general studies major.

Steven Jones
So, tell me about your coming out story. How was your coming out story? Was it with a friend? Was it with family? Was it random? Did you plan it?

Student J
Honestly, me personally, um, boys don't really excite me. They don't excite me at all. Like, I mean, as friends, yes. I rather have them as friends. But like, my coming out story, I actually at first, kept it as like, you know, as a lowball. Because when people find out that you're interested in girls as your same sex, I actually got to a point, as I got older, I was like you know whatever happens, happens. You know this is my life, and how I want to live it. I'm going to live it. Even though it's against different religions. Even though in different countries you can be banned for that, I just didn't care. It was my life. You can't live a life that someone else want you to live. Like, trying to make others happy when you're not happy. Like me personally, I never liked dresses. I never liked you know, hair bows or anything like that. Like me personally, I'm happy. I wanted to be happy in the skin that I was in. Meaning like, if I'm wearing dresses and stuff like that, it doesn't. I'm not comfortable with doing that. I'm comfortable wearing like you know regular clothes, jeans, you know, sneakers, all that type of stuff. I had to really just come to reality, like, if I'm going to come out. I'm going to have to come out, you know, happy. But instead of being, you know, feeling like I'm shut in. And when you feel like you are shut in, people tend to fall into depression. They tend to not be happy and it shows by like, you know, losing weight or your face expressions are like saddening, or you don't want to be around
nobody. So that's basically me coming out. Basically, not caring what other people think of me.

**Steven Jones**

So, you just decided one morning that you were just gonna come out and you just started living freely, or did you actually have a conversation with someone?

**Student J**

I'm the type of person that just be like, at first, I cared about other people. No, I didn't just wake up you know, saying you know, I'm just gonna come out whatever. You have to go day-by-day by stop wearing the girl clothes or whatever. I was in a store and I was like, I'm tired of spending my money on girl clothes that I'm not going to wear. Basically, putting my money to waste. So, I started to actually buy boy clothes or whatever, because that's the stuff I'm comfortable in. By telling my parents or what not, it took me a while to tell my mom. I tried to keep it from my dad because, you know, I really didn't know, like, my dad's side of family, like, you know, they can be a little, you know, judgmental.

That's the same thing on my mom's side. They can be a little judgmental. So, actually, I didn't wake up one morning and say I was going to come out. It was day-by-day that I did it. I started getting my hair cut. Guy have haircuts, and you know, people are going to notice I had a haircut. So, they are going to have a little question mark if you don't tell him. So, one day I was at the hospital with my granddad. I had like a little boy haircut, and one of my aunts on my mom's side was like, "that's a boy haircut." They had came to my mom with it, but that was before my mom knew I liked girls. That didn't make me feel no type of way. I explained to them that I had cut it and was wanting my edges to grow back or whatever. I tried to tell different stories. But as I got older, I got confidence and I started not to care what people think. I was like, they think of me whatever they wanted to think of me. I didn't care. I just didn't care. I started wearing boy clothes. I never did what the girls did. The only sport that I played that was girly was volleyball. Like I played basketball, you know, track and all this stuff. Every day I wake up, I would put on like some shorts, you know, basketball shorts or jeans or something like that, or even like when I started going out with my friends.

But honestly, I feel like it was my friends who really made me confident. Because I do have friends that dress like boys or whatever. I would go out of town, and we'll be dressed in comfortable boy clothes. I feel like it was the help from my friends. I am going to give them credit. I didn't really just sit down and talk to them, but when I was with them, or out at parties, they were in boy clothes. They didn't care what people thought of them. And so, with me just being around them, it also just made me come out. So that's basically me coming out. On down the line, I did tell my mom. I was like, well, mom, I'm just gonna be honest, I do like girls. Her remarks were, I'm still going to love you the same. Do I agree with it? No, I don't agree with it, but by her telling me that I'm still going to love you the same, see me personally, some kids grow up in a single home. Their fathers there, but then again, they end up finding someone else. The only okay I wanted was my mom because my dad wasn't really there. He was there, living with us, but he moved out. I didn't really care what he thought of me because he wasn't there. You
got some family members that just want to be in somebody’s business. So, one day, I ended up posting something on social media. So, when you post something on social media, it gets out. So, it got back to my dad. He was disappointed. Did it hurt my feelings? Yes, it did, because growing up, I really looked up to my dad. Growing up we were really close. We were two peas in a pod or whatever. And it took me a good little minute to get back with my daddy's side of the family. I didn't come around. I would say it took almost a year for me to come around. They wanted me to come to family events, but I never showed up. I would tell them I would come but never showed up. It took me a while to get comfortable coming around, as in being around them with boy clothes on or just looking like a boy all the time like, I wasn't comfortable. But my dad like, um, I guess he saw me, you know, one day and whatever, and I believe, deep down he was so happy to see me because he hadn't seen in a long time. I would come around but I wouldn't just give him the attention like, a dad and daughter would give each other attention. So, with that being said, he started coming around. He used to text me and be like, "I just want you to know that I love you, and whatever choices you make that's the choice you make. The only person you have to look up to is God." I actually got to a point where I was like, okay, yeah, I see that he's trying to come around. I see that he's trying. With that being said, he would continue to text me and tell me he loved me. When he invited me to the family event, I was like, okay. I got around them. They were happy to see me. It was on the Fourth of July, and I actually got to see all my family like face-to-face. And I was actually to bring the girl that I was with and they actually enjoyed me being there. That really meant a lot to me. Because I missed my family. The family that I was around, we use to do everything. I use to always go to their house and spend the night. But as I was spending the night, I was actually pretending to be somebody that I wasn't. As in like, a girl or, you know, trying to like I wasn't you know, so boyish or tomboyish. I wasn't even comfortable with doing that. They tried to keep braids in my hair. I like the braids still to this day. But, I'm comfortable with the hair that I have now since locking up my hair or whatever. I'm comfortable with the hairstyle I have now. But I mean, the Fourth of July like, that really meant a lot to me. To actually reunite with my family and all that. And the only problem I have now is like, I still have to pretend to be somebody that I'm not like, around my mother's family. Like, since I still have my haircut. I wear my hair down so they won't really just see my haircut or talk about my haircut. But I mean, the only person I really just been around that have seen my haircut was my granddad and my step-grandma that's on my mom's side. She would be like, "Are you going to grow your hair back? I really don't like that haircut." But deeply down, I don't want to be disrespectful and be like, whatever, I like what I like. I still say, I'm going to grow it back. But in all actuality, I'm not growing it back. It's just something for them just to get off my back. I don't know if they really just know that I like girls. I don't know. They have never asked, and I have never brought it up. But being around my mom's sisters, I haven't seen them in a good little minute. Being around my grandma, they are Seventh Day Adventist or whatever. You know that religion, they go to church on Saturdays. They have Sabbath rest and all of that. My grandma, I have seen her when I had to jump her battery off, but I had my hair covered up you. really Oh, you know, I'm saying, but I still pretend to be somebody I'm not when I'm around, like, you know, my
grandma on my mom's side. So, it's basically kind of like the story that I have right now for me coming out.

Steven Jones
If you could change one or two things about your college experience, what would it be and why?

Student J
Nothing at all. I will say that because I feel free. When I'm not at home, I feel free. I feel so free. As in like, I can be somebody that I want to be. I don't have to pretend nowhere or none of that. I mean, I love my college experience. Coahoma like, I have met some good people at Coahoma.

Steven Jones
That's great. That's great. So, what is the campus environment like for LGBTQ students at Coahoma?

Student J
It's free like, people be the people they want to be. Even if it's gay girls or gay boys. They are going to be who they are. Like I said, I mean, we're free. Don't nobody judge nobody. If somebody's gonna judge somebody, you know it's the boys judging the other boys. You know, but that's life. You're going to get judged either way, everywhere. The gay environment there don't nobody feel no type of way or anything. Because people are just going to be them honestly.

Steven Jones
So, what does the institution do to ensure that LGBTQ students feel a sense of belonging? What does Coahoma do to make sure that LGBTQ students feel like they belong there?

Student J
They still welcome you with love. They still let you participate in a whole lot of things. Like I said, they are really friendly. They don't judge. If they do judge, they do it behind closed doors, which we'll never know that because it's a closed door. In the open door, they still open their arms up to you and not judge you. If they do judge you, they don't show you that they judge. Like, they actually accept you for who you are. There is no discrimination. They don't tell you, “you can't wear that.” You need to take that off. They don't do none of that. It's not no discrimination against you. And that's another reason why like Coahoma. Like I said, the only people that are going to judge you is the students. As in boys judging other boys. But they are not going to come in your face and be like, you're wrong, or all that type stuff. They are going to welcome you. I like their environment, honestly. How they welcome me.

Steven Jones
So, for you, what is the ideal HBCU experience and does Coahoma meet the qualifications? So, for you what is the ideal HBCU experience? If you were thinking
about going to an HBCU, before you went to Coahoma, what would have been the ideal experience?

**Student J**
I'm sorry. I didn't really understand that question.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, a lot of times people that go to HBCUs say, hey, you will never really understand what college is like, unless you've been to an HBCU because for the HBCU experience. So, what's the HBCU experience? What's ideal?

**Student J**
Honestly, I say, a safe environment. Um, fun things. Have good resources. You actually feel safe. Like I say, it's fun. It's actually fun. That's the top of the pyramid, like it's fun. You can actually be yourself, you know, is nothing different. You're not in high school. You're not in preschool, or none of that. It's just a safe environment actually, honestly, good resources.

**Steven Jones**
So what LGBTQ resources are available to you on campus, and what LGBTQ resources, if any, would you recommend establishing?

**Student J**
From my perspective, I really don't know what type of environment they have, but I will say that if you are having suicidal thoughts, they do provide counselors. The closest I have ever got to resources, is this interview right here? This is the closest I have ever got to discussing stuff like this, is this interview. Honestly, they tell us to go to the counselors. If you can't talk to your friends or anything. You go start to the counselors, but um, yeah, that's basically it. They will just tell us to go to, you know, the counselors or whatnot. I really haven't looked into to that. But like I said, the closest I ever got to it was, you know, this interview and when I said I would do this interview right here.

**Steven Jones**
Okay. So, if you could recommend any type of LGBTQ resource to Coahoma, and say, hey, as a LGBTQ student, I would like for you guys to have X, Y, Z. What would those resources be? You know, what would you like to see as a LGBTQ student? What kind resources would you like to see on campus?

**Student J**
Honestly, I would like to see, you know, um, resources, like, you know, like I said, since some people might not feel like going to some counselors. I feel like if it was a resource, I feel like it'll be something like this, somebody you can actually talk to. If somebody's feeling some type of way, it could be like a group, class, or meetings we can have to express our thoughts or how we are feeling. People like us, some people might have stories behind why they are the way they are, or some people might not have stories of
why they are the way they are. I feel like we should have groups for us, you know, to express our thoughts or how we feel, or are we getting treated the same or, you know, or talk about stuff that goes on at home, like I say, like, you know, my perspective of how to, like, actually come out or tell your parents. Because you never know, if they are going to accept you or not accept you. Some people may be gay and their parents are ready to put them out or treat them differently than their other siblings, or just treat them bad. You know, like, you never know, what's the background of why a person's the way they are. It's not because we know that it's not the right thing to do. But can we control how we feel? Yes. Is it going to be hard? Yes. But you never know how your life really supposed to be. You never know if this is actually a story of your life. Because, you know, people ask me all the time, like, they were like, why do you choose to be the way you are if you know it's against God or whatever. But I always tell them like, this is my point of view, before I was created, God knew how I was going to be. I will tell them that it is not that I wake one morning and say that I like girls. This is just a calling on my life, you never know. Twenty years, or thirty years from now, I don't know, who is to say I couldn't have a changed life and this will be story I can tell. Twenty or thirty years from now, you never know. You probably set a goal, but you never know. It could always be something to actually step in front of that goal. Like I said, this just could be a story of my life. Like, I never know where I'll be twenty or forty years from now. Nobody knows what's going to happen.

Steven Jones
Well, thinking back to when you first decided to attend Coahoma, and given your lived experience on campus there at Coahoma, did you make the right choice in attending Coahoma for your college education?

Student J
Um, honestly, I felt like, um, when I first got there, I felt like yes, I made the right choice because of like my roommates or whatever. I really love my roommates. I make friends quick. Either it was like people, they wanted to talk to me or, you know, they just wanted to be my friend because, you know, I'm actually a cool person. And I'm actually like, somebody that people could actually come up and talk to if they have problems or whatever. But yeah, you disagree with some stuff with schools, or whatever. Yes, it was a whole lot of stuff that went on at Coahoma that have you like having a question mark. But as of now, as I think back, I feel like I'm making a good choice. I feel like I'm really making a good choice. Even though I didn't go off to a university right after I graduated, I feel like where I am right now, and my decision is, I feel like I made a good choice going to Coahoma. Even though I do disagree with some of the stuff they do, or there is a question mark towards them at times, but I honestly feel like I actually made a good choice.

Steven Jones
So, elaborate on that for me, when you say you disagree with them sometimes, or there's a question mark. What do you mean by that? What do you disagree with it?
Student J
Okay, this virus. Up in the Delta, they have many cases like, it's very, very bad up there. So, when it was move-in day, you know, that could have been told to freshmen that they couldn't move in because the dorms are full, or that they only wanted athletes or extracurricular students on campus. So, it was some freshmen that bought stuff for their dorms, and ready to move in and experience college. I felt like when they were posting stuff on Facebook or whatever, they could have been told the freshmen. Instead, they came out with the email on move-in day and they had a lot of people confused or mad because the stuff they bought for their dorm. With that being said. I feel like it was no point of just have athletes on campus if we were only going to do online classes.

Steven Jones
So, describe the level of faculty and staff support for LGBTQ students at Coahoma. Are the faculty and staff supportive of LGBTQ students?

Student J
Um, honestly, from my experience, they treat me the same. They welcome me. The faculty, the police officers, coaches; they treat everybody the same. We even had on the team a boy, you know, he was gay. And did our coach actually treat him differently? No, my coach didn't treat him differently. He treated everybody the same. Um, but this is only my perspective. You know, I can't speak on other people, or whatnot. But me personally, if you dressing like a boy or having a haircut as a boy, you know, they all treated me the same. I didn't see or experience people or the faculty treat me any different. If you treat them with respect, they're gonna treat you with respect. But if you don't treat them respect, they're gonna let you know. Like, if you want respect, you're gonna have to give it in return. Like so, I mean, I don't see, I've never experienced any shade thrown or anything like that.

Steven Jones
So how successful is Coahoma in communicating available LGBTQ resources to LGBTQ students?

Student J
Like as in like talking to them or just having a conversation?

Steven Jones
For instance, if you are LGBTQ student, how successful is Coahoma with communicating, hey, we have a LGBTQ Learning Resource Center on campus. Hey, we have a gay straight alliance. Please join. Hey, we have a safe space. If you ever feel the need to speak with someone? Or hey, we are having this activity tonight for LGBTQ students.

Student J
They will send out an email. That's how they will let us know if there are events. Or they will post it on the website.
**Steven Jones**
Do they promote any LGBTQ events or programs on campus?

**Student J**
In my experience there, no. They have never advertised anything like that? Honestly, the only thing they have advertised is this interview. I'm trying to remember if my coach actually said anything about this or not. Like I said, they look at everybody the same. So, they include everybody. They never just had a separate event for us. No, they never had a separate, from the times I've been there, no they haven't. Like I said, they look at people the same. If we have an event, everybody come together. So, it never a separate event for us.

**Steven Jones**
If you could use one word to describe your college experience, using one word, what would that one word be and why?

**Student J**
I would say fun. Because all of the times I've been on campus, I have had lots of fun. They made sure we have fun, or they made sure we have fun events. They always kept us busy at times. If we weren't having events, everybody would either go to the basketball court or just be outside communicating. So, I will say, fun. I really enjoy Coahoma, actually. That's another reason why I wish the virus would have never came. I would have been at school right now.

**Steven Jones**
Okay, so how often does Coahoma offer any type of LGBTQ-related event or program?

**Student J**
We have never had that kind of event.

**Steven Jones**
So how do you feel about having LGBTQ faculty and staff on campus?

**Student J**
Honestly, I don't feel any type of way. They are still going to get the job done. They are one of us, but they are just grown.

**Steven Jones**
So, what does a diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you? What does the diverse and inclusive HBCU campus look like to you?

**Student J**
It's like a big old community. Everybody comes together. A campus with different races.
Steven Jones
Would you recommend your HBCU to other perspective LGBTQ students? Why are Why not?

Student J
Of course, I will. I mean, like I said, my experience, it's a good experience. Everybody gets treated the same, you won't get judged. It's like you're a regular student, a regular person. It's like a big family, like a family reunion. I love it. I really really love. Me personally, I'm a big people person. I can be a mean person too, I'm a Scorpio.

Steven Jones
So, you just answered my question from earlier, when I said to you what is the ideal HBCU and you just said it's like a big family reunion. A big happy family. We're all just in this together.

Student J
Yeah, it's nothing to be skeptical about or try to hide out about. It's like a big old family. We're family.

Steven Jones
So, what can your HBCU do, if anything, to enhance the college experience for LGBTQ students?

Student J
Honestly, from my perspective, if you like try to have the spotlight just on us, it's going to be talk on the side. It's going to be like, dang, they doing more for them than they are doing for us. Like yes, this is a big thing going around the world right now. There is a lot of discrimination. Some people feel some type of way about this stuff. So, if they try to do something different the kids that's not, the straight kids that are not gay or whatever, are going to feel some type of way. Because if I wasn't gay, I would too. Because y'all are having the spotlight on them when it's supposed to be a big happy family. You know what I'm saying. I feel like they should continue to have everybody involved. Still have an open arm and not have the spotlight just on us. I don't feel no type of way. I love what they're doing. There's nothing I feel like they should do different. Honestly, the pride stuff, they don't even have to do that. They don't even have to do that. Because the other people might, you know, they going to feel some type of way. I feel like they are going to feel some type of way. So, like, I'm actually comfortable with what they're doing now. I feel like they're doing a good job at it, honestly.

Steven Jones
So, describe your experience living in student housing. Talk about your relationship with your roommates and how is the staff towards LGBTQ students in student housing?
**Student J**
My freshman year, I had two roommates. It was three to a room. They actually love my vibe. They started to like me, but I said, we are roommates and we are going to stay roommates. Because I don't want no confusion between nobody, you know, because that does cause a big confusion. Because if you're trying to, like, interact with me and somebody else like me on campus, somebody's going to feel some type of way. So, before I got in with them, I let them know because I'm a straight-up person. Everybody in the dorm was either with somebody that like girls or not. If they felt uncomfortable, the dorm advisor is going to fix the problem right then and there. Personally, living in student house, I never got treated differently. Everybody wanted to be around me. Everybody wanted play around and joke around all day. I mean, student housing is excellent. Like I said, if you do have a problem, you go down and let the dorm advisor know and she take care of it or whatever. It was nothing to worry about. I always made sure my roommates were comfortable. I'm still going to be me. I was going to be the way I am. I'm not going to go overboard or nothing like that. I am going to be friendly. And that's what I told them, just to be fair, or say oh, you know, we it was time for us to change or something like, change clothes. They didn't care. They still saw me as a girl. And that's another reason why, they saw me as a girl. Like they didn't care about changing in front of me. They didn't care nothing about it. But me personally, did I feel some type of way? I mean, deep down inside, yes, I did feel some type of way. So, what I did was, I would sit at my desk and scroll my phone and make it seem like, you know, yeah, I know, I'm not gonna sit there even though I like girls. I'm not gonna sit there and be weird and just looking at you. I'm not going to do that. But you know, they did ask me before they even started doing that, do you feel some type of way, you know, with me changing in front of you or anything like that? Like, honestly, I need to be asking you that because like, you know, my roommates. I mean, they didn't know they didn't like girls. Had they had an experience? Yes, they did have an experience, but I did ask them, what do y'all want me to do when you changing clothes. They were like, girl you are still a girl. We don't care. Like they still treated me as in I was still a girl. Like, they still looked at me as one of the girls.

**Steven Jones**
That is awesome. That's awesome. Tell me about your experience interacting with heterosexual students on campus. Has it been good?

**Student J**
I have lots of friends that are straight. I have a lot of friends that are LGBTQ also. We all interact the same. Like I said, we are like a big family. They don't judge or that I don't have to pretend to be someone that I'm not. That's why I really love Coahoma. Just being in that kind of school environment. I have lots of straight friends. I mean, they don't look at me no different or whatever. It's like I gain more boy friends but I have started to gain both at the same time. I'm comfortable. I'm so comfortable.

**Steven Jones**
So, have you ever witnessed or been a victim to homophobic acts on campus?
Student J
Been a victim, most definitely not. Have I witnessed it? I have never witnessed it. But it was a little incident that happened on campus in the football dorm. It's just rumors. You know, I'm saying like, you never know what the real story is because you never was there. I mean, I really don't want to speak on it because I really don't know what exactly happened. But I mean, there was an incident as in a boy, um, getting bullied. And a football player actually trying to like do something to him. I mean, they say, you know, they took his snacks or something like that, but he did have a whole lot of people come up behind him. You know, um, it was just a one incident you know, as in when they heard about the football players you know, once you picking on somebody. They going to take care of you. Like I said, Coahoma is a big family. If someone is picking on someone, they are going to take care of you. The victim did come back to try to finish. Everybody did question, be like, why would he come back? I'm not going to say I have witnessed a victim but we did have one incident.

Steven Jones
Are you talking about the football player who was accused of raping the other football player? Or is this a different incident that you're talking about?

Student J
It's the same incident, yes.

Steven Jones
Okay.

So how successful are your instructors and professors in preventing homophobia in the classroom?

Student J
Most definitely, they don't allow it and they are going to address it. And, um, if somebody making fun of somebody else, they they're gonna take care of it. Like I said, they're big on bullying on the campus. They are against bullying. So, most definitely, they're gonna address it. If they are making fun of someone that is gay or whatever, they are going to address it. The teacher is not going to keep teaching. They are going to stop class and address it for sure. They're going to address the issue and you are going to be up out of there. They're gonna do something about it, regardless of anything for sure.

Steven Jones
So, is there anything else that you would like to add? We've come to the end of the interview. The floor is open for you to add anything you would like.

Student J
I mean, I am who I am. I'm comfortable with who I am. I rather live in a body that I want to be in instead of living in a body that somebody else want me to be in. I'm very comfortable with the person who I am. Even though, I have gotten to a point where I
don't care what nobody thinks of me. I mean, I don't feel like I'm obligated to actually live how another person want me to live. That goes for my parents, friends, anybody. I'm happy.

Steven Jones
I greatly appreciate you taking the time to participate in the study. You had some really good things to say and it's very interesting to see your prospective of Coahoma. Thank you again, and I wish you the very best of luck in your studies at Coahoma.

Student J
Yes, sir. Thank you.

Steven Jones
Have a good day.

Student J
You too.

Steven Jones
Bye.
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