Surviving Stigmatizing Sociocultural Environments: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into LGBTQ+ POC Experiences of Meaning-Making

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this critical narrative study was to examine the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities within sociocultural contexts. Existing literature suggests that LGBTQ+ POC may have cultural resources that positively impact their meaning-making structures, which may buffer against minority stress and the adverse effects of concealing or negotiating their stigmatized social identities. However, this body of literature is non-existent in current counseling and counselor education discourse. This study aimed to fill this research gap and provide counselors and counselor educators with knowledge to help collaborate and develop interventions to address LGBTQ+ POC layered and contextual concerns. Thus, critical narrative inquiry was implemented to explore the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of ten LGBTQ+ POC, engaging in negotiation and concealment strategies to manage social stigma. Two 45–60-minute semi-structured interviews were used to generate data for this investigation. Self-authorship Theory and Intersectionality were used to situate emerging data.

Through a narrative thematic analysis, six themes materialized. The findings illustrated how participants experienced social stigma and discrimination and used stigma management strategies to adapt to their external environments. While they employed these strategies, they found affirming spaces and crafted an internally driven meaning-making structure. This structure helped participants develop personal meaning out of themselves and others as they negotiated and concealed their stigmatized social identities, aiding in dismantling internalized oppression. Thus, participants narratives underscored how they are resilient and resist subjugation through meaning-making and embodied cultural strengths. Implications for counseling practice and counselor education, as well as recommendations for future research, were discussed.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the following:

Melissa White-Coleman a.k.a. my Mama

"You got one life baby, live it."

–Mama

Nigel Shelby and other LGBTQ+ persons of color

"There's nothing wrong with you, there's a lot wrong with the world we live in."

– Chris Colfer

counselors, counselor educators, freedom fighters, activist, and people fighting for justice

"You never completely have your rights, one person, until you all have your rights."

–Marsha P. Johnson

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"I am because we are and, since we are, therefore I am."

–Dr. John Mbiti

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Chapter 1: Introduction & Literature Review

Before queer liberation efforts, science and religious institutions normalized the social stigmatization and discrimination of Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other non-heterosexual (LGBTQ+) people (Alexander et al., 2018; Eaklor, 2008). The psychiatry field was influential in the social stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people by classifying non-heterosexuality as a psychological disorder in DSMs 1-3 (Drescher, 2015). These oppressive tools influence cultural beliefs and legislation aimed at criminalizing non-heterosexuality (Drescher, 2015). As cultural beliefs shifted from pathology to greater acceptance, White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women emerged as the prototypical LGBTQ+ person.

Current dominant sociocultural narratives portray LGBTQ+ people as a homogenous group of White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women (DeFillippis, 2016). White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women are erroneously recognized as trailblazers in queer activism efforts, like the Stonewall riots in 1969, widely cited as defining moments in queer liberation (Hegarty & Rutherford, 2019). White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women advocate for equality and issues related to heterosexism and homophobia, commonly accepted as the only issues affecting LGBTQ+ people (DeFillippis, 2016). However, contrary to these dominant sociocultural portrayals, the LGBTQ+ community is not a homogenous group of White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women (DeFillippis, 2016). These individuals were not responsible for the Stonewall riots in 1969 that accelerated queer activism efforts, but trans-identifying people of color (POC) were (Hipp et al., 2019).

Issues related to equality, heterosexism, and homophobia are not the only problems affecting the LGBTQ+ community. Portraying the LGBTQ+ community as White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women erases the lived experiences of within groups, like LGBTQ+ POC. For

example, less is known about the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC and how their wellbeing is impacted by stigmatizing sociocultural environments. Boehmer (2002) demonstrated how out of 3,777 articles addressing LGBT public health issues, 85% excluded participants' race/ethnicity. Similarly, Barnett (2019) explained how the majority of psychological research articles on LGBT concerns were published within the last ten years. The dearth of literature on the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC could limit counselors' understanding of how to address their varied and contextually layered concerns.

Current scholarship demonstrates how LGBTQ+ POC regularly experience multiple forms of social stigma and discrimination in varied sociocultural contexts. They may experience heterosexism, sexism, and racism with family, friends, ethnic-racial and LGBTQ+ communities as well as institutionalized forms of discrimination resulting from their devalued social identities (Balsam et al., 2011; Sung et al., 2015; Sutter & Perrin, 2016). LGBTQ+ POC may even experience discrimination at work and within other social contexts (Ghabrial, 2017). For example, in a survey study conducted by National Public Radio et al. (2017), 57% of LGBTQ people reported experiencing insults, and 53% reported experiencing derogatory remarks as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Researchers did not present within-group racial differences in this study, which may contribute to silencing of the LGBTQ+ POC community and perpetuate the LGBTQ+ community as a homogenous group. According to Meyer's (2003) minority stress model, these figures may be higher for LGBTQ+ POC due to the additive forms of discrimination they may encounter. In this same study, 32% of LGBTQ POC reported experiencing discrimination when applying for employment, compared to only 13% of White LGBTQ people.

Similar to these experiences, in a U.S. Transgender Survey, 61% of Black identifying Transgender people reported experiencing mistreatment and abuse by police officers (James et al., 2016). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ POC are disproportionately targeted by anti-LGBT violence, which may have deleterious effects on their welfare. For example, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2018) found that 71% of anti-LGBTQ violent reported homicides were against POC.

The literature on LGBTQ+ POC experiences of multiple minority stress highlights risk and resiliency perspectives. The risk perspective emphasizes the adverse mental health impact of experiencing multiple forms of stigma (Moradi et al., 2010). The resiliency perspective suggests successful adaption to multiple minority stress (Moradi et al., 2010). The majority of related research has focused primarily on the risk perspective (Barnett et al., 2019), which includes risk associated with concealing or negotiating one's stigmatized identities to avoid multiple minority stress (Moradi et al., 2010; Meyer, 2003).

Specifically, research demonstrates how concealing and negotiating one's identity is a maladaptive coping strategy that may lead to more mental and physical health problems (Beals et al., 2009; Frost, 2011; Frost et al., 2007; Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007), which represents the risk perspective. Scholars theorized that concealing a stigmatized identity creates cognitive dissonance from fear of being discovered (Frost, 2011), negatively impacting one's self-worth (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Jackson & Mohr, 2016). However, the majority of this research on LGBTQ+ people has been completed with mostly White (Beals et al., 2009; Cole et al., 1996; Frost et al., 2007; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Talley et al., 2011) and male participants (Fields et al., 2014; Schrimshaw et al., 2013; Wilson & Miller, 2002), making it difficult to

generalize these findings to within groups, like POC, women, or people existing at these intersections.

Limited research highlighting the resiliency perspective for LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized social identities exists. In particular, one study asserts that LGB POC are more likely to conceal their sexual orientation than White LGB people; however, perceived heterosexism and internalized homophobia were not remarkable for LGB POC but notable for White LGB individuals (Moradi et al., 2010). These results suggest that LGB POC participants could negotiate and conceal their social identities without experiencing adverse mental health effects, like internalized homophobia. Therefore, this study points to how LGBTQ+ POC may have cultural resources and strengths that White LGBTQ+ individuals may not (Meyer, 2010; Moradi et al., 2010). LGBTQ+ POC may be able to use these cultural resources to redefine the self and others through meaning-making, which provides a pathway for interpreting their experiences of being-in-the-world (Frost, 2011). Meaning-making is a metaphysical process through which people understand themselves, their relationships, and the overall world (Baxter, Magolda & King, 2012; Markman et al., 2013). Stress appraisal research explains how people make meaning of stressors, which determines how it affects their mental health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, meaning-making may act as a buffer against minority stress for LGBTQ+ POC, which may explain how they are not as susceptible to the adverse effects of concealing and negotiating their social identities to deal with social stigma.

There is no current literature in counseling or counselor education investigating the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their social identities, and how it impacts their wellbeing. Without this information, counselors and their educators are ill-equipped to address the concerns of LGBTQ+ POC (Remly & Herlihy, 2016)

because they are employing literature generalizing the LGBTQ+ population as White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women (DeFilippis, 2016). As a result, counselors fail to consider the cultural values of LGBTQ+ POC and may inaccurately pathologize their concealment and negotiation behaviors. In turn, counselor educators would provide inaccurate knowledge to counselors in training. Thus, the counseling environment for LGBTQ+ POC could parallel oppressive, hegemonic sociocultural contexts and become an added source of stress for LGBTQ+ POC (Corey et al., 2015). Therefore, the current study seeks to fill this research gap by investigating the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their social identities.

This chapter includes a literature review that (1) examines the current problem, (2) summarizes the literature presented, and (3) explains the purpose, significance, and the research question guiding this investigation.

Social Stigma & LGBTQ+ POC Experiences in Varying Sociocultural Environments

Earlier scholars conceptualized stigma as an attribute that individuals use to devalue whole persons to reduced parts (Goffman, 1963). This initial understanding of stigma emphasizes the person expressing these attributes while failing to consider the social, political, and cultural factors that create and reinforce what attributes are valued and devalued in society (Herek, 2009). More recently, scholars describe stigma as "negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords to people who possess a particular characteristic or belong to a particular group or category" (Herek, 2009, p. 441). This definition encapsulates how stigma represents shared, agreed-upon knowledge that reinforces power structures based on a particular characteristic, which restricts or increases access to valued social resources (Herek, 2009; Link &

Phelan, 2001). Therefore, stigma is a social process that is continuously negotiated and decided upon by society. Scholarship consistently describes LGBTQ+ POC experiences of social stigma in varying sociocultural contexts.

In general, LGBTQ+ POC disproportionately experience social stigma as a result of their devalued social identities. LGBTQ+ POC live at the intersections of ethnic-racial, sexual, and gender identities that society collectively denigrates (Fields et al., 2014; Frost 2011; Herek, 2009; Pena-Talamantes, 2013). Current scholarship describes LGBTQ+ POC encounters with racism, sexism, heterosexism, and transphobia as they navigate diverse sociocultural environments (Ghabrial, 2017; McConnell et al., 2018; Pena-Talamantes, 2013; Sung et al., 2015). Such encounters may occur across the lifespan for LGBTQ+ POC (Kum, 2017). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ POC experiences of social stigma and discrimination may occur daily and in subtle social interactions that communicate harmful insults, recognized as microaggressions (Balsam et al., 2011; Sue et al., 2007). Thus, LGBTQ+ POC are susceptible to experiencing social stigma in multiple forms amongst myriad sociocultural environments across their lifespan (Fields et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017; Kum, 2017; Kuper et al., 2014).

Literature continuously demonstrates the impact of several sociocultural environments in perpetuating social stigma and discrimination in the lives of LGBTQ+ POC at the individual and institutional levels. At the individual level, some LGBTQ+ POC described feeling rejected and ridiculed by family members and peers because of their non-heterosexual identity (Fields, 2014; Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Similarly, some LGBTQ+ POC report experiencing racism from romantic partners (Balsam et al., 2011), and heterosexism from interactions with strangers (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Others describe confronting racism within LGBTQ+ communities and heterosexism within

their ethnic-racial community (Fields et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017; McConnell et al., 2018), as well as other forms of discrimination as they interact in various contexts (Barnett et al., 2019).

At the institutional level, LGBTQ+ POC report experiencing institutionalized forms of discrimination that limit their access to valued social rewards. For example, there is limited local and state-level legislation and no explicit federal legislation protecting LGBTQ+ POC from sexual and gender identity-based discrimination in employment, housing, mortgage lending, and healthcare (Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project, 2014; Romero et al., 2020). As a result, LGBTQ+ POC could be fired, denied medical treatment, and denied a loan because of their LGBTQ+ identity (Center for American Progress and Movement Advancement Project, 2015). In fact, Sutter & Perrin (2016) reported how participants in their study encountered heterosexism by employers. Additionally, Grant et al. (2011) found that Transgender POC described greater rates of job loss and occupation discrimination compared to White Transgender people.

Additionally, Badgett et al. (2007) surveyed Asian and Pacific Islander LGBT people about their experiences with LGBT-based discrimination. Results indicate the between 75% and 82% of Asian and Pacific Islander LGBT people experienced LGBT based discrimination at work. Similarly, LGBTQ+ POC report feeling excluded in college settings due to their ethnic-racial and LGBTQ+ identities (Duran, 2018). It is important to note that LGBTQ+ POC are a heterogeneous population and may have contrasting experiences of discrimination.

LGBTQ+ POC report significant differences in how they experience discrimination, which is influenced by gender, sexuality, ethnic-racial differences, and other sociocultural, environmental factors. For example, Sung et al. (2015) discussed Asian-American Lesbian and Bisexual women's experiences of racism, heterosexism, and sexism within Asian culture and society. The research

further illustrated how these women experienced sexual objectification due to stereotypical social constructions of Asian women. In contrast, Fields et al. (2014) discussed how Black men who have sex with men experience heterosexism within family, peer, and community contexts. Participants in this study described encountering heterosexism and feeling strained to conform to Black cultural and social expectations of hypermasculinity, which they felt was unique to Black men. If they failed to meet these masculine gender norms, they were taunted and shunned. Together, these studies illustrate LGBTQ+ POC within-group differences in experiences of social stigma and discrimination. Such experiences are further contextualized for LGBTQ+ POC when other social identities like socioeconomic and ability status, religion, and undocumented status are considered (Cyrus, 2017; Duran, 2018). There is limited discourse investigating the relationship between these other intersecting identities (Cyrus, 2017).

Nonetheless, there is clear evidence that LGBTQ+ POC are vulnerable to the cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination resulting from their stigmatized social identities (Drazdowski et al., 2016; Meyer, 2003). This social stigma emanates excess stress for LGBTQ+ POC because of their social position, which is known as minority stress (Meyer, 2003). The proceeding section defines and analyzes the impact of minority stress on LGBTQ+ POC. Comprehending the components and outcomes of minority stress for LGBTQ+ POC is a critical component of understanding their experiences.

Minority Stress Model

Meyer (2003) defines minority stress as excess socially-based stress to which individuals from stigmatized social groups are susceptible due to their minority position. This stress is persistent and distinct from all persons' everyday stress because it targets stigmatized individuals

who exist outside of normative social structures. Meyer developed the minority stress model to explain the stress process unique to LGB individuals who experience stigma. He sought to explain the higher psychiatric problems caused by excess stress related to oppressive and discriminatory contexts. Now, this theory is applied to other stigmatized social groups to highlight their experiences.

According to Meyer (2003), the minority stress model explains the stress process and coping resources of stigmatized individuals and how it influences mental health outcomes. This process begins with examining objective environmental circumstances and one's minority status in the environment, which can lead to general life stress and additional stress because of one's minority status. For example, experiencing general life stress may be financially related; in contrast, encountering minority stress may occur due to LGBT-based discrimination when applying for a mortgage loan. In general, minority stress may lead to feelings of rejection, personal identification with minority status, and internalizing these oppressive messages, which can lead to adverse mental health outcomes. However, if one perceives their minority identity as a source of strength and has individual and community coping and social supports, they can mitigate the impact of this stress. While this model explains the minority stress of single-minorized individuals, it fails to account for individuals who hold multiple minoritized social identities. The minority stress model conceptualizes additive stigma-related stress (Meyer, 2003) but it is ineffective in capturing the interlocking forms of oppression that may impact multiple minoritized individuals at any given time (Crenshaw, 1991; Lewis & Grzanka, 2016). A person’s multiple experiences of minority based oppression do not occur independently of one another, and conceptualizing their experiences creates intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

There is an absence of minority stress research that investigates the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC. This limited research that does exist posits risk and resilience positions to explain their stress processes and mental health outcomes (Cyrus, 2017; Meyer, 2010; Moradi et al., 2010). The risk perspective assumes that LGBTQ+ POC experiences greater stress than White LGBTQ+ people as a result of holding multiple marginalized identities (Meyer; 2010; Moradi et al., 2010). Some scholars term the additive marginalized identities as double jeopardy, acknowledging the disadvantages of holding two marginalized social identities, and triple jeopardy, recognizing the disadvantages of holding three marginalized social identities (Beale, 1970; Green, 1994; Meyer, 2010; Walker, 2018). For example, the double jeopardy perspective could apply to Black Gay men who may experience heterosexism and racism due to their sexual and racial social identities. The triple jeopardy perspective could apply to Trans women of color who may experience heterosexism, transphobia, and racism concurrently due to their gender, sexual, racial, and social identities.

In contrast to the risk perspective, the resiliency perspective asserts that LGBTQ+ POC can overcome the effects of minority stress due to cultural resources and strengths that buffer the impact of stigma (Meyer, 2010; Moradi, 2010). The cultural resources and strengths of LGBTQ+ POC are unique and not held by White LGBTQ+ people (Meyer 2010). For example, studies suggest to LGBTQ+ POC, family and ethnic-racial communities that they should prepare to deal with stress through ethnic-racial socialization processes (Kuper et al., 2014; McConnell et al., 2018). Such processes promote pride and self-esteem for dealing with ethnic-racial stigma in society (Kuper et al., 2014). Therefore, scholars assume LGBTQ+ POC can draw upon these cultural resources and strengths to buffer against other forms of oppression, like heterosexism. Researchers suggest ethnic-racial socialization processes may account for lower stress levels in

LGBTQ+ POC (McConnell et al., 2018). The corresponding section examines the limited literature on risk and resiliency positions.

Responses to Multiple Minority Stress

Risk Perspective

Research endorsing the risk perspective increasingly denotes the adverse mental health effects of LGBTQ+ POC holding multiple marginalized identities in stigmatizing social environments. In fact, Barnett et al. (2019) performed a content analysis of psychological research on LGBTQ+ POC and asserted that most of the studies focused on pathology. Researchers found that empirical psychological scholarship documenting the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC did not appear until 1988, with the majority published within the last ten years. Results indicate that Transgender POC, LGBT women of color, and older LGBT POC are underrepresented in psychological research, rendering their lived experiences invisible. Furthermore, Barnett et al. indicated how more than a third of the studies in their content analysis focused on the detrimental effects of holding multiple marginalized identities, and half reported on the psychological symptoms of LGBTQ+ POC. Some of the psychological symptoms noted are depression, anxiety, a reduced sense of contentment with life, and an overall increase in mental health problems (Balsam et al., 2011).

Some quantitative studies support the risk perspective. For example, Sutter and Perrin (2016) surveyed two hundred LGBTQ+ POC about their mental health and experiences of discrimination. Results suggest LGBTQ+ POC who experience rejection and unequal treatment from stigmatizing sociocultural groups are at risk for poorer mental health outcomes. For example, LGBTQ+ discrimination and racism adversely affect the mental health of LGBTQ+ POC.

However, LGBTQ+ discrimination more highly correlates with suicidal ideations than discrimination on the basis of race. This heterosexism may predict suicidal ideations, which is indicative of poor mental health. Comparably, in a survey by McConnell et al. (2018), the authors found greater stress levels for LGBT men of color due to encountering ethnic-racial stigma in LGBT communities and LGBT stigma in their neighborhoods.

Also, research on LGBTQ+ POC suggests a link between poor mental health outcomes and internalized oppression (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Researchers define internalized oppression as embodying society's prejudice and negative beliefs about oneself (Choi, Israel, & Maeda, 2017; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010), which is a key factor impacting the mental health of stigmatized individuals. Current discourse emphasizes the connection between internalized oppression and poor mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ POC who encounter both racism and heterosexism. For instance, Drazdowski et al. (2016) surveyed 200 LGBTQ+ POC to determine if racism and heterosexism collectively predicted internalized oppression and greater substance use. Results indicated that experiences of racism and heterosexism for LGBTQ+ POC led to increased internalized oppression. This increase in internalized oppression significantly led to illicit substance use to cope with negative beliefs about one's self. Specifically, in this study LGBTQ discrimination was more directly related to internalized oppression and greater illicit substance use.

Similarly, Velez et al. (2019) surveyed 318 LGBTQ+ POC to understand the additive relationships of heterosexist discrimination, racist discrimination, internalized heterosexism, and internalized racism on mental health and well-being. Results indicate that experiences of heterosexist discrimination, racist discrimination, internalized heterosexism, and internalized racism was positively associated with poor mental health and well-being. Thus, literature provides

a thorough understanding of the psychological symptoms and detrimental effects of experiencing multiple minority stress related to social stigma and discrimination for LGBTQ+ POC. However, these studies fail to consider other forms of discrimination, personal characteristics, cultural factors, and other protective factors in investigating if LGBTQ+ POC experiences of multiple minority stress will lead to greater mental health problems or predispose them to these problems.

Resilience Perspective

To begin with, Meyer (2015) defines resilience as the ability to persevere and thrive in the face of hardship. Resilience buffers the adverse effects of stress for successful adaption to adversity. Adversity and successful adaptation are conditions needed for resilience to thrive. Furthermore, Meyer differentiates between two types of resiliency: individual and community-based resilience. Individual-based resilience focuses on the personal qualities of the individual in coping with stress. In contrast, community-based resilience focuses on the collective actions of communities to assist individuals in coping with stress. Understanding the impact of both individual and community-based resilience is imperative to conceptualize the wholeness of LGBTQ+ POC experiences in stigmatizing sociocultural environments (Meyer, 2015).

Very few studies have been completed to investigate how individual and community-based resilience in LGBTQ+ POC aid in overcoming multiple minority stress. These investigations were primarily studied qualitatively, which provides contextualized data (Creswell, 2017). At the individual level, Meyer et al. (2011) found positive marginality in the narratives of LGBTQ+ people who experience heterosexism, racism, and sexism. Positive marginality refers to a phenomenon in which individuals hold positive perceptions of one's identities by understanding

they are not responsible for their social positioning but have the power to work to change these oppressive social conditions.

In a Sung et al. (2015) qualitative study, results suggested individual and community-based resilience of Asian American Lesbian and Bisexual women encountering heterosexism, sexism, racism, and sexual objectification are prevalent. At the individual level, some participants reported being free of oppressive gender non-conforming roles, having a positive sense of self, challenging others' oppressive responses, and developing empathy for others. At the community level, some participants indicated finding support systems, creating safe spaces, and taking social action. These narratives of resilience indicate the participants' ability to create their identity, viewpoints, and meaning out of their layered experiences (Sung et al., 2015) in stigmatizing sociocultural environments. This empirical study acknowledges LGBTQ+ POC ability to self-author and define one's self in stigmatizing sociocultural environments.

As previously noted, the limited scholarship on LGBTQ+ POC experiences of multiple minority stress denotes risk and resiliency perspectives. The risk perspective has received more attention in the literature than the resiliency perspective. From these studies, it is difficult to ascertain if LGBTQ+ POC are at a greater risk of mental health problems due to holding multiple marginalized identities, which could expose them to added forms of oppression and discrimination. It appears that the qualitative studies on resilience provide contextualized data that is not present in the quantitative studies. The qualitative studies were able to emphasize the multiple minority stress that LGBTQ+ POC encountered and how they had individual and community-based modes of overcoming this added stress. Nevertheless, these paradoxical findings highlight the need for more research in this area that counselors can reference in working with LGBTQ+ POC. These

findings illustrate how counselors need to assess each LGBTQ+ person individually and rely less on group dynamics to determine how that person experiences multiple minority stress.

Current literature is even less clear on understanding how LGBTQ+ POC manage their stigmatized identities as a coping and adaptive strategy. For example, limited research on LGBTQ+ POC examines how some individuals may conceal and negotiate their stigmatized social identities to adapt to stigmatizing sociocultural environments (Sung et al., 2015). These studies identify how LGBTQ+ POC conceal and negotiate their identities within these contexts. However, it is still unclear if concealment or negotiation process of LGBTQ+ POC leads to greater or fewer mental health problems. Literature examining concealment and negotiation process of LGBTQ+ POC is discussed and examined.

Stigma Management: Code Switching and Negotiation/Concealment of Stigmatized Identities

Identity management of stigmatized individuals is a process for coping with sociocultural environments that denigrate characteristics of one's identity (Frost, 2011). This identity management process can be traced to early literary works by W.E.B. Dubois. Dubois (1982) introduced the term double consciousness to refer to two different and contradictory consciousness states that Black people embodied to deal with White hegemonic, oppressive conditions. Currently, the literature on identity management processes of stigmatized individuals identifies two strategies: concealment and code-switching (Frost, 2011). Concealment of a stigmatized identity refers to a process where individuals with concealable identities, like sexual minorities, hide or camouflage their stigmatized identity to avoid the negative impact of stigma (Quin & Earnshaw, 2013). Code-switching refers to an identity management process of individuals with visible

stigmatized identities, like POC, and how they switch between their speech, dress, and behaviors when interacting with their ethnic-racial communities and with White outgroup members (Cross, 2012). These identity management strategies for coping with one's minority status create internal dissonance from the fear of being exposed and discerning when and how to negotiate these contexts (Frost, 2011). Research states how this internal dissonance and burden create additional stigma-related stress, like internalized oppression (Frost, 2011). Internalized oppression occurs due to the theory that concealing or code-switching behaviors perpetuate a lack of self-worth and reinforces one's minority status (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Jackson & Mohr, 2016).

Furthermore, previous research and theories highlight the positive mental health benefits of sharing aspects of one's self with others (Beals et al., 2009; Meyer, 2003; Pennebaker, 1995) and consistently posits the negative impact of concealing aspects of one's self (Frost et al., 2007; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007). Specifically, quantitative research on LGBT people indicates that concealment coping strategies compromise their mental health and overall well-being (Cole et al., 1996; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Talley et al., 2011), which is synonymous with the risk perspective. However, these studies included mostly White (Cole et al., 1996; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Talley et al., 2011) and male participants (Schrimshaw et al., 2013), making it insufficient to generalize findings to within groups, like POC, women, or people existing at these intersections. Results as such perpetuate the LGBTQ+ community as being a homogenous group of White people or men. Interestingly, one quantitative study did include a sample of cis-gendered, non-White Lesbian women, which indicated the adverse mental health effects of concealing their stigmatized identity (McIntrye et al., 2014). Still, there was no recognition or implications regarding the influences of culture.

There are limited qualitative studies regarding concealment strategies by LGBTQ+ POC and their impact on mental health. Fields et al. (2014) studied the sociocultural expectations of hyper-masculinity described by Black men who have sex with men and how this contributed to HIV risk. In this study, participants recounted growing up in sociocultural environments that rejected non-heterosexuality and expected hyper-masculine gender roles. As a result, participants felt obligated to conform to heteronormative, hyper-masculine gender roles. To conform to these roles, participants camouflaged their sexuality and non-conforming gender identities by engaging in physical violence and using illicit substances (Fields et al., 2014).

While camouflaging their non-conforming gender and sexuality helped maintain support, it left them socially isolated, caused distress, and undermined their self-esteem (Fields et al., 2014). Participants felt these factors influenced their HIV risk because hiding their sexuality isolated them from receiving social support and limited their access to HIV prevention resources (Fields et al., 2014). This study identified the adverse physical and mental health effects for Black men who have sex with men, which represents the risk perspective. However, there is a paucity of qualitative literature that highlights how LGBTQ+ POC concealing or hiding their identities are resilient (Sung et al., 2015).

Ghabrial (2017) described the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC non-disclosure of their sexual orientation and other identities to their parents out of fear of being disowned. To deal with this, participants reported hiding invisible aspects of their identities like sexual orientation, HIV status, mental health issues, and disability status, identities which society tends to stigmatize. While participants experienced added minority stress and concealed their stigmatized identities, some of the participants were resilient despite encountering heterosexism, sexism, and racism. At the individual level, participants reported experiencing positive marginality and positive

intersectionality, which is the recognition of ways that identities can support each other. At the community level, participants unearth LGBTQ+ POC specific environments for support, which possibly contributes to improved well-being.

Comparing the limited quantitative and qualitative studies on LGBTQ+ POC concealment strategies, it seems it is difficult to determine if concealment strategies lead to more risk or resiliency. Additionally, these studies illustrate the lack of attention to LGBTQ+ POC code-switching strategies. Furthermore, the quantitative studies indicate a risk perspective, while the qualitative studies indicate both risk and resiliency perspectives. In particular, qualitative studies emphasize contextual data that quantitative studies fail to capture. Methodological differences and cultural factors may point to varying findings.

Moreover, cultural factors may assist LGBTQ+ POC in becoming resilient as they use concealment and code-switching strategies to cope with their stigmatized identities. For example, research notes in racial and ethnic identity development models how individuals become more resilient as they encounter discrimination (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2014; Neblett & Carter, 2012; Romero, Edwards, Fryberg, & Orduña, 2014). Similarly, some research on LGBTQ+ POC suggests that family and ethnic-racial communities prepare them for dealing with anti-ethnic-racial stress through ethnic-racial socialization processes (Kuper et al., 2014). Such processes promote pride and self-esteem for dealing with ethnic-racial stigma in society (Kuper et al., 2014), which researchers believe LGBTQ+ POC utilize to deal with other forms of stigma (McConnell et al., 2018). These cultural factors may assist LGBTQ+ POC in making meaning out of the self and their experiences of social stigma, which enables them to avoid the harmful effects of concealing their stigmatized identities.

Meaning-Making & Negotiation/Concealment

Theorists have long postulated that a defining feature of what it means to be human is delineating and representing the world symbolically, essentially creating meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Bonanno, 2013; Frankl, 1946/1985; Kegan, 1982). Kegan (1982) explained:

> Being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception because we are the meaning-making context (p. 11).

Similarly, Frankl (1946/1985) stated,

> Man's main concern is not to gain pleasure or to avoid pain, but rather to see a meaning in his life. That is why man is even ready to suffer, on the condition, to be sure, that his suffering has a meaning (p. 179).

Therefore, the current study defines meaning-making as a person's unique interpretive filter for understanding themselves, their relationship to their surroundings, their surroundings, and the overall world (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Markman et al., 2013).

While meaning-making is philosophically well-grounded, research on meaning-making is conflicting. Most researchers have conducted meaning-making studies quantitatively, which others have suggested has added to these differing outcomes (Mattis, 2002; Park, 2010). This lack of consistency in meaning-making research is due to divergent operational definitions of meaning-making (Park, 2010), inadequate instruments (Bonanno, 2013), methodological limitations, and the absence of a norm model of meaning-making (Park & George, 2013). Thus, current literature describes varying meaning-making processes and outcomes (Park, 2010).

Still, researchers continue to emphasize that meaning-making occurs when a person's appraisal of an event is discrepant with their personal or global meaning-making structure (Kunnen & Bosma, 2000; Park, 2010; Watkins, 2008). Early articulations of stress appraisal examine meaning-making during this process. For example, Lazarus & Folkman (1984) explained that people's perception of a stressor is a mode of meaning-making that determines how the stressor will affect the person when it is discrepant from their personal meaning structures. As a result of this, Frost (2011) emphasizes how meaning-making processes may act as a buffer to stigma-related stress by providing a pathway for redefining experiences of stigma.

This process may materialize unconsciously, deliberately, or include a combination of both (Park, 2010). Furthermore, researchers describe meaning-making as a developmental process (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) that occurs over time (Updegraff et al., 2008). Some researchers suggest that a mindful, non-critical method of meaning-making is not related to increased distress (Rude et al., 2007), while judgmental processes may result in more distress (Watkins, 2008). Additionally, meaning-making that leads to the generation of meaning is considered more adaptive than meaning-making that leads to no positive outcome (Park, 2010).

Overall, there are mixed results related to whether meaning-making may act as a buffer to stress, resulting in positive adjustment (Bonanno, 2013; Park, 2010). These differing results are due to the lack of consensus on an operational definition (Park, 2010), methodology limitations (Park & George, 2013), and other aforementioned challenges previously noted. In addition, meaning-making is not only an intrapsychic activity. It also includes interpersonal and cultural aspects (Park, 2010), which may attribute to the lack of consistency in linking meaning-making to positive adjustment.

In particular, these interpersonal and cultural aspects may help explain how some LGBTQ+ POC are capable of making meaning out of the self, their relationships, and sociocultural contexts, while concealing or negotiating their stigmatized identities. For example, interpersonal and cultural aspects like ethnic-racial socialization practices (Kuper et al., 2014), religious and/or spiritual traditions (Neimeyer et al., 2002), non-biological kinship support systems (Borneman, 1997), and other cultural practices and values may positively impact LGBTQ+ POC meaning-making structures. Many of these interpersonal and cultural practices are considered unique to LGBTQ+ POC because they emphasize drawing strengths from their racial-ethnic identities. These types of interpersonal interactions and cultural practices are generally not identifiable in White LGBTQ+ individuals.

A quantitative study by Moradi et al. (2010), compared the risk and resilience perspectives of stigma with White LGB individuals and LGB POC. Their findings suggested that cultural factors may explain these differences. Specifically, researchers found that LGB POC are more likely to conceal their sexual orientation than White LGB people; however, perceived heterosexism stigma and internalized homophobia was non-significant for LGB POC but significant for White LGB individuals. These results clearly illustrate that LGB POC participants could negotiate their social identity without experiencing negative mental health effects. Therefore, this study suggests that LGBTQ+ POC may have cultural resources that White LGBTQ+ individuals do not have access to, which allows them to negotiate and conceal their social identities. These cultural resources may help LBTQ+ POC redefine the self and their environment through meaning-making, which provides a mode for appraising their experiences in the world (Frost, 2011). This is consistent with stress appraisal research that considers meaning-making as a mode of appraising stress, which determines how it impacts people's wellbeing

(Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, meaning-making acts as a buffer to minority stress for LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized identities, but research on this topic is virtually non-existent.

There is a single higher education study that examines the lived experiences and meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their social identities within sociocultural environments. Pena-Talamantes (2013) qualitatively studied the meaning-making structures of six Latinx Lesbian and Gay students as they negotiated their identities at home and college. The researcher utilized a narrative, thematic analysis, and figured worlds theory to explain the self-authoring (meaning-making) of Latinx Lesbian and Gay students. Figured worlds theory is a non-stage model identity development theory that surmises individuals are the executors over their identity construction (Holland et al., 1998). There are four contexts in which identity construction occurs: figured worlds, positionality, space of authoring, and making worlds (Holland et al., 1998). These contexts help explain the socially and culturally constructed worlds people exist in and how individuals produce self-knowledge.

Results from Pena-Talamante's (2013) study illustrate how Latinx Lesbian and Gay students created a self-authored identity buffer of self-acceptance that helped them negotiate their identities in stigmatizing home and college environments. This self-authored identity buffer helped participants conform to their environment's norms without undermining their perceived sense of self. Results indicate how positive self-authoring acts as a resilience mechanism that buffers Latinx Lesbian and Gay students from adverse effects of multiple minority stress as they negotiate their identities in stigmatizing social environments.

With the use of figured worlds theory, this study represented how the student's self-authored identity buffer aided LGBTQ+ POC in becoming resilient as they negotiate their

stigmatized identities. It helped understand how Latinx Lesbian and Gay students came to understand their stigmatized identities, which provided a buffer against the adverse effects of concealing their identities. However, in Baxster Magolda's (2008) theory of self-authorship, she notes other meaning-making structures central to people's lives. Baxster Magolda identifies beliefs, identity, and social relationships as essential dimensions in which people develop self-knowledge and meaning.

Additionally, Baxster Magolda's (2008) theory defines meaning-making as a developmental and contextual process that includes internal and external influences on meaning-making. Pena-Talamante's use of figured worlds theory failed to capture the transactional nature of meaning-making, which encompasses external contexts. Therefore, to understand the lived experiences and meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal or negotiate their social identities, researchers must recognize the influences of culture and external environments.

Summary of Literature Review

In this chapter, the dearth of literature on LGBTQ+ POC experiences of social stigma within sociocultural environments was described and contextualized. These experiences highlighted the multiple minority stress that LGBTQ+ POC encounter and the risk and resiliency perspectives highlighted to explain their stress processes and mental health outcomes. In particular, literature examining concealment strategies of LGBTQ+ POC within the risk and resiliency perspectives was examined. Most of the included literature covers the adverse impact of concealing stigmatized identities to cope with multiple minority stress. However, most of these studies were conducted with mostly White LGBTQ+ participants and men, which is insufficient to generalize to within groups, like POC and women.

Similarly, a single study by Moradi et al. 2010 compared risk and resiliency perspectives with White LGB individuals and LGB POC. Results asserted that while LGB POC are more likely to conceal their sexual orientation than White LGB people, White LGB people's perception of heterosexism and internalized homophobia is more significant than LGB POC. This result suggests that LGBT+ POC may have cultural faculties that White LGBTQ+ individuals do not possess, which provides them with a method for reinterpreting their experiences through meaning-making. Meaning-making may act as a shield against minority stress by providing a mode for redefining these encounters while they conceal and negotiate their stigmatized social identities (Frost, 2011). This area of research is underdeveloped in counseling and in counselor education literature. Without such knowledge, counselors and their educators could unknowingly cause harm to LGBTQ+ POC by relying on previous studies that generalize and depict the LGBTQ+ community as homogenously White. Thus, the literature clearly provides a rationale for this problem and the current research investigation.

Significance of the Study

Increasing counselors' knowledge of the meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC could significantly enhance the counseling experience for this population. This knowledge could aid counselors in clinical assessments of how concealment and negotiation may uniquely be experienced by LGBTQ+ POC (Moradi et al., 2010). Understanding the relationship between social stigma, concealment, and meaning-making may help counselors and counselor educators develop interventions to address LGBTQ+ POC intrapsychic functioning and external environments. For example, counselors and counselor educators could develop interventions to increase the meaning-making capacity for LGBTQ+ POC who have to negotiate or conceal their

social identities for survival. Furthermore, this knowledge could help counselors understand how stigmatizing sociocultural environments impacts LGBTQ+ POC and how they resist and exert some level of agency through meaning-making. Lastly, this knowledge will also help counselors and counselor educators actualize social justice and advocacy counseling competencies, which is needed to address the multi-layered concerns of LGBTQ+ POC.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities within sociocultural contexts. Existing literature suggests that LGBTQ+ POC may have cultural resources that positively impact their meaning-making structures, which may buffer against minority stress and the adverse effects of concealing or negotiating their stigmatized social identities. However, this body of literature is non-existent in current counseling and counselor education discourse. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this research gap and provide counselors and educators of counselors with knowledge to help collaborate and develop interventions to address LGBTQ+ POC layered and contextual concerns.

Research Question

The following research questions guided this critical narrative inquiry:

1. What are the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?

2. What are the meaning-making structures, and embedded cultural resources of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?

Chapter 2: Methodology

Current research has demonstrated that LGBTQ+ individuals may negotiate or conceal their stigmatized social identities to manage stress within sociocultural environments (Moradi et al., 2010). Most researchers have asserted that this practice is a maladaptive coping strategy that likely leads to adverse mental health effects (Beals et al., 2009; Frost, 2011; Meyer, 2003). However, researchers conducted these studies with mostly White (Beals et al., 2009; Cole et al., 1996; Frost et al., 2007; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Talley et al., 2011) and male participants (Fields et al., 2014; Schrimshaw et al., 2013; Wilson & Miller, 2002). There is a clear need to understand these dynamics for LGBTQ+POC individuals.

Furthermore, there is a single study that suggests LGBTQ+ POC may have access to cultural resources that help them to avoid the negative effects of concealing and negotiating their identities, which White LGBTQ+ individuals typically lack (Moradi et al., 2010). These cultural resources may help LGBTQ+ POC redefine themselves, their relationships, and environments through meaning-making, which provides a pathway for interpreting their experiences. This is consistent with stress appraisal research explaining how a person's perception of a stressor is a mode of meaning-making (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, meaning-making may act as a safeguard against stigma-related stress, creating a method for reinterpreting such encounters. However, no current counseling and counselor education research examines the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their stigmatized identities and how it impacts their wellbeing. Therefore, the current study explored the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities within sociocultural contexts.

This chapter outlines the strategies and procedures used to conduct this study. It includes descriptions of the methodology, philosophical assumptions, and rationale for using narrative inquiry for this study. The chapter also includes a description of the theoretical foundations underlying the research, participant recruitment and data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. Finally, credibility, ethical considerations, researcher's reflexivity are explicated as they relate to the study.

Qualitative Methodology

Some researchers trace qualitative methodology to the 17th century in ethnographers' works in the discipline of anthropology (Vidich & Lyman, 2000). However, many other disciplines have influenced the evolution of qualitative methodology. For example, other disciplines like history, humanities, medicine, nursing, social work, communication, and sociology aided in the development of this methodology (Creswell, 2014; Given, 2008). Furthermore, researchers explain the revival of qualitative methodology in the 1960s as a social movement against positivism (Given, 2008; Schwandt, 2015). Qualitative methodology rejects objectivist claims and provides methodological plurality to study the complexities of social life (Given, 2008). Thus, this methodology is unique in that it provides a praxis for contextualizing a particular phenomenon, yielding a rich perspective (Given, 2008).

Qualitative research is inconsistently defined—current literature has described it as a method, methodology, research, and paradigm (Schwandt, 2015). As a methodology, it is a rigorous inductive research process for understanding humans in their naturalistic setting and how they make meaning of their experiences of being in the world (Berg & Lune, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It is an inductive, interpretive framework that positions the observer or researcher

in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), which is antithetical to quantitative approaches that make objectivist claims (Given, 2008). Thus, the researcher is the instrument who collects, interprets, and analyzes emerging data (Creswell, 2017) to make representations about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Researchers employ a qualitative research approach for several reasons. For example, researchers use this approach in the following circumstances: when a phenomenon cannot be studied quantitatively; when they are interested in intricate details and contextual factors; when they seek to hear the voices of silenced individuals; when they want to empower them or dismantle power differentials in their study (Creswell, 2017). For these reasons, a qualitative methodology was appropriate for the current research study.

A qualitative methodology was the most suitable approach for representing the lived experiences and meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate their stigmatized identities. These lived experiences are stored in LGBTQ+ POC minds in the configuration of stories that can be heard when asked open-ended questions (Josselson, 2013). Also, previous quantitative research studies generalize negative mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ people who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities (Meyer, 2003). However, these studies were conducted with mostly White LGBTQ+ people as participants. Additionally, some studies failed to measure within-group differences based on race (Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014). Therefore, utilizing a qualitative methodology gave voice to LGBTQ+ POC who are silenced in this discourse and helped to contextualize current research on concealment and negotiation strategies for managing social stigma.

Philosophical Assumptions

An essential feature of qualitative studies is for the researcher to delineate the philosophical assumptions influencing their research design (Creswell, 2017). These assumptions explain the researcher's beliefs about ontology (reality), epistemology (knowledge), axiology (values), and the research processes that inform their study (Creswell, 2014). Huff (2009) states that the researchers' philosophical assumptions can influence the development of research questions and methods used in a study. These philosophical assumptions also provide an evaluation benchmark for making informed judgments about interpretive inquires. For example, reviewers may gain more in-depth insight into the rationale supporting the researcher's decisions related to the formulation of all aspects of a study.

The current study is guided by a bricolage of philosophical assumptions, which influenced the development of all components of the research study. I acknowledge that sociopolitical contexts that often go unnoticed may influence LGBTQ+ POC realities. I also recognize that their knowledge is subjective and transactional. I believe all research is value-laden and is "always and forever a political enterprise" (Given, 2008, p. 643). These beliefs influenced the development of the current research focus and question, which developed due to the intersectional invisibility of LGBTQ+ POC in current counseling literature. This belief is also synonymous with critical theory, which assumes that reality is mediated by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender institutional structures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theorists consider the historical context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and how power, domination, and ideology affect people's behaviors, personal meaning, and communication processes (Kushner & Morrow, 2003; Pitre et al., 2013). Critical theorists aim to transform and liberate people within these structures (Kushner & Morrow, 2003). This epistemological and ontological position aligned with my selection of critical narrative methodology, and intersectionality and self-authorship theoretical frameworks. I selected this

methodology and theoretical framework because it allowed me to take an active approach in critiquing the sociocultural environments that force LGBTQ+ POC to negotiate their stigmatized identities. Furthermore, these approaches helped with understanding LGBTQ+ POC storied lives through a sociohistorical lens and how they produced counter-narratives to resist stigmatizing contexts.

Critical Narrative Inquiry

Critical narrative inquiry derives from narrative inquiry. Researchers dispute the early beginnings of narrative inquiry; however, most scholars see it as a 20th-century development (Reissman, 2008). Narrative inquirers assume that people are storytelling beings (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007) and vary in stories studied and methods used (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Narrative inquiry is conceptualized in various ways (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007), depending on the discipline (Reissman, 2008). Researchers suggest that narrative inquiry is rooted in Dewey's Theory of Experience and constructivism, which posits the transactional and relational nature of experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Thus, narrative inquiry is a methodological approach aimed at understanding people's experiences in the world through time, place, and social interactions (Clandinin, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). These experiences generate stories "both in living and telling" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 46) that create meaning for studying narratively (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). This distinguishes narrative inquiry from traditional storytelling, including stories of events (Andrews et al., 2008). Narrative inquiry focuses on relationality, sequentially connects events, and ascribes meaning to craft a storied investigation (Andrews et al., 2008).

Critical narrative inquiry is distinct from narrative inquiry because narratives are not exclusively conceptualized as individually shaped and constituted (Rudman & Aldrich, 2017). Instead, narratives in critical narrative inquiry are socially constituted. This acknowledges that individuals make meaning of their experiences within socio-political realities (Hardin, 2003; Rudman & Aldrich, 2017). As a result, critical narrative investigations include critiques of the sociopolitical realities that impact people's experiences of being-in-the-world. Furthermore, critical narrative inquirers include a political stance in their investigations. They reject apolitical narratives because they are insufficient to understand people's storied lives and transform their contexts (Barone, 1992). In contrast, narrative inquirers start with and privilege individuals' lived experiences without capturing a sociopolitical stance within their investigations (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). However, critical narrative inquirers presuppose that by concentrating on "individual experiences as a source of insight, the larger social conditions that shape the narratives in which people live go unexamined" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 48). Therefore, critical narrative inquiry aids in studying individuals within contexts of power and how they "re-authorize their own positions" (Allen & Hardin, 2001, p. 174).

Furthermore, researchers also describe critical narrative inquiry as critical storytelling (Barone, 1992). Specifically, critical narrative inquiry is a methodology that allows researchers to investigate participants' stories through a social, historical, political, cultural, and ideological lens (Barone, 1992; Duran, 2019; Rudman & Aldrich, 2017). Critical storytellers' primary objective is to "empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (McLaren, 1989, p. 160).

A critical narrative inquiry was overwhelmingly harmonious with the aim of the current proposed study. First, critical narrative inquiry is a pathway for hearing silenced and

underrepresented voices in society (Caine et al., 2018; Duran, 2019; Frost & De Vries, 2011). This approach provides an in-depth understanding of others' subjective experiences and the meanings attached to these experiences (Clandinin, 2006; Frost & De Vries, 2011; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Gaining contextual knowledge about people's experiences allows them to define their reality while challenging society's normative meta-narratives (Frost & De Vires, 2011). This observation was synonymous with the aim of the current investigation. Current research mostly generalizes all LGBTQ+ people's negotiation and concealment experiences as maladaptive, failing to account for within-group differences (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). Therefore, this investigation sought to understand the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC who are silenced in counseling and counselor education discourse. This study provided a space for LGBTQ+ POC to produce counter-narratives to the normative meta-narratives in LGBTQ+ scholarship.

Furthermore, this methodology is fundamental to understanding "individual meanings, knowledge and identity" (Pitre et al., 2013, p. 118) because it provides an intrapsychic look into the self within sociohistorical contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Riessman, 2012). Also, a previous research study on LGBTQ+ people, oppression, and identity used a critical narrative methodology to facilitate their investigations (Duran, 2019). Therefore, a critical narrative methodology helped provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC and the meanings attached to these experiences as constituted within sociocultural environments. A critical narrative approach also aided in accessing contextually laden knowledge located in the stories of LGBTQ+ POC, which includes knowledge about the self, and relational, social, cultural, and institutional influences that shape these stories through time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Theoretical Foundations

This study, the data collection and analysis process are guided by the following theories: Self-authorship Theory and Intersectionality. I describe these frameworks and present a rationale for their use in the current investigation. Together, Self-authorship Theory and Intersectionality help situate the emerging data and promote greater credibility.

Self-Authorship Theory

Self-authorship theory is foundationally rooted in Kegan's (1982) theory of evolution, a holistic human developmental theory that describes people's meaning-making structures across the lifespan. Meaning-making is described as people's interpretive lens for understanding the world (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Kegan (1982) states,

> being a person is the activity of meaning-making. There is thus no feeling, no experience, no thought, no perception, independent of a meaning-making context in which it becomes a feeling, an experience, a thought, a perception because we are the meaning-making context (p. 11).

Therefore, people are perceived as meaning-making beings who create meaning-making structures. These structures explain how people come to knowing, and include, cognitions, and intrapersonal and interpersonal elements (Kegan, 1982). People's meaning-making structures continue to evolve and become more complex as contextual influences materialize (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Contextual influences affect the tempo and pace of development in these areas (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Nevertheless, although the complex meaning-making described in Kegan's work aided in the development of self-authorship theory, Baxter Magolda is credited for this in her college student development scholarship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Embedded in student development scholarship, Baxter Magolda (2008) describes self-authorship as a sophisticated form of meaning-making where individuals internally define their own "beliefs, identity, and social relationships" (p. 269). This capacity to self-author is determined by people's personal characteristics and external environments (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Furthermore, self-authorship occurs on a developmental continuum that is not linear and fixed; rather, it is a journey of milestones that includes stumbling blocks, forward progression, and delays (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Thus, self-authorship is a complex journey that contextualizes meaning-making.

According to Baxter Magolda & King (2012), self-authorship has three major phases. At one end of the continuum, individuals' meaning-making structures are situated more in external influences versus their internal voice. Because of this position, individuals rely on external influences like family and peers to inform their beliefs, identities, and the essence of their social relationships. Individuals begin to cycle through this phase as they begin to experience tensions between their external influences and internal voices. As individuals experience these tensions, they still rely on external influences to guide their meaning-making structures; however, they begin to recognize the pitfalls of this approach.

Next, individuals move to the crossroads phase, where they outright question their external influences and start formulating their internal voices (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). This phase includes a mixture of external and internal influences on individuals meaning-making structures (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Individuals move through the crossroads phase when their internal voices have developed in a manner that allows them to deal with external influences (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Individuals then cycle through to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

At the self-authorship end of the continuum, individuals meaning structures are situated more internally where they define their own beliefs, identities, and social relationships (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). In this self-authoring domain, individuals still encounter external influences, but their internal voices guide them in coping with these influences (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Thus, the individual becomes the interpreting authority as they interact with various sociocultural environments.

Self-authorship theory is immensely relevant to the current investigations which seek to explore the meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC. Previous research has established the use of self-authorship in examining the meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ people. For example, Abes & Jones (2004) investigated the meaning-making structures of cis-gendered undergraduate students who identified as Lesbian to understand the construction of this identity. Researchers used a narrative methodology to facilitate this investigation. Results indicated that meaning-making acted as a filter between external environmental influences and internal perceptions for understanding their Lesbian identity. As participants' meaning-making structures evolved and became more complex, so did their ability to filter external environmental influences in constructing their Lesbian identity. This study illustrated the use of self-authorship theory in studying the experiences of LGBTQ+ people.

Moreover, these researchers (Abes & Jones, 2004) further emphasized the need for exploring the self-authorship of individuals negotiating multiple dimensions of identity. This parallels the goals of the proposed study. Specifically, self-authorship provides a contextual template for understanding the diverse meaning-making experiences of LGBTQ+ POC. LGBTQ+ POC are a heterogeneous population of individuals requiring a nonlinear and complex model for capturing their meaning-making experiences. Therefore, this study utilized self-authorship theory

to analyze and describe the meaning-making experiences of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate different sociocultural environments.

Intersectionality

Evolution of Intersectionality

Intersectionality is not a new or innovative practice originating from the legal scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw's article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." Crenshaw (1991) is irrefutably responsible for coining the term intersectionality. However, scholars note the earliest trace of intersectional ideals in Sojourner Truth's speech at an 1851 women's right's convention in Akron, Ohio (Bowleg, 2008; Bowleg, 2012; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). In this speech, Sojourner Truth critically acknowledged the intersections of being a Black woman. She explained that due to her identities as a woman and Black individual, she had never been "helped into a carriage, or over mud-puddles or given any best place"…" ain't I a woman?" (Bowleg, 2008, p. 323). Thus, intersectionality was birthed out of activism and continued in the social justice work of Black Feminists and women of color in the 1960s and 1970s (Bowleg, 2012; Carbado et al., 2013; Collins, 2015), many of whom also identified with the queer community (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). These activists and scholars advocated for dismantling social inequities and raising awareness about single identity activist politics that were incongruent with their lived experiences (Collins, 2015; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

According to Collins (2015), many of these Black Feminists and women of color activists were scholars, leading to the inclusion of intersectional ideals in academic scholarly discourse. In academia, initial intersectional ideals focused on the interlocking systems of oppression

surrounding race, class, and gender that Black women experienced. Still unnamed, these ideals evolved in women's studies and spread to other disciplines, like law. This is where, lawyer and scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), coined the term intersectionality in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color."

Crenshaw (1991) called attention to two intersectionality categories that oppressed women of color who experience domestic violence and rape. One category termed political intersectionality, encompasses social movements and single identity politics and how these can reinforce systems of oppression for individuals living at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. The other category, structural intersectionality, critiques the hegemonic social structures that construct different social inequities. These structures produce a stratified society where some are privileged and others are marginalized. Crenshaw utilized these intersectional frameworks to call attention to single identity politics in both the feminist and antiracist movements, and how that contributed to both movements' ineffectiveness in addressing violence against women of color. Moreover, Crenshaw raised awareness about the lack of attention to power structures that create and maintain a stratified society. Additionally, the researcher emphasized the need for understanding how people who experience marginalization resist these power structures and exert some level of agency over these social categories. These early foundational roots of intersectionality resulted in this framework traversing multiple disciplines and activists, scholars, and community organizations implementing this in multiple modes (Carbado, 2013; Cho et al., 2013).

Intersectionality is implemented globally and has taken many different forms to produce its own set of knowledge projects (Collins, 2015). Disciplines like psychology, counseling, history, sociology, philosophy, public health, and legal studies use this framework (Bowleg, 2012; Chan

et al., 2019; Cho et al., 2013; Cole, 2009). Intersectionality extends to other dimensions of differences like sexual orientation, social class, religion, disability, and immigration status, among other varying social categories and structures (Carbado, 2013). Intersectionality is a field of study, analytical strategy, and a social justice praxis (Collins, 2015). Most of the intersectional scholarship explores intersectional components, critique its utility as a method of analysis, and discusses political interventions for transforming hegemonic systems of oppression (Cho et al., 2013).

Moreover, some scholars identified other forms of intersectionality. For example, Carbado (2013) identified colorblind and gender-blind intersectionality to illustrate the erasure and reinforcement of normative social standards of whiteness, and heterosexuality, often missing from intersectional discourse. Similarly, Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach (2008) introduced intersectional invisibility to acknowledge how people with multiple interconnected identities are overlooked or misrepresented because they do not conform to normative social prototypes. As a result of intersectionality traversing various contexts, scholars continuously critique its misapplication as an analytical method (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2015; Dill & Kohlman, 2012).

Dill & Kohlman (2012) criticized the misapplication of this framework in their weak and strong intersectionality findings in scholarly discourse. Weak intersectionality is limited to describing differences and multiple intersecting identities without analyzing social, political, ideological, and cultural power structures that produce social hierarchies. In contrast, a strong intersectional approach analyzes power structures concerning social identities. Strong intersectionality goes beyond describing interlocking identities, seeking to identify and dismantle hegemonic systems of oppression in the lives of people who experience marginalization. Therefore, scholarship on intersectionality should include weak and strong perspectives to create

a transformative assemblage; this strategy is how Black Feminists and women of color originally articulated this concept.

Definition of Intersectionality

According to Collins (2015) "the term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2). It is not a comprehensive identity theory (Crenshaw, 1991) with fixed procedures for implementation (Bowleg, 2012; Cole, 2009). Instead, it is a framework or embodiment shift for conceptualizing social categories (Cole, 2009). As an analytic method, intersectionality is not only concerned with describing and critiquing power structures and how it creates a stratified society; an intersectional analysis must also demonstrate social justice and understand how multiply marginalized people resist subordination (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). In the current study, intersectionality was used to describe and analyze the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who live at the intersections of multiply marginalized identities. Additionally, intersectionality will critique the social, cultural, political, and ideological power structures that reproduce systems of oppression in the lives of LGBTQ+ POC. Without an intersectional framework, it is difficult to understand the impact of stigmatizing sociocultural environments on the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ POC and how they transcend these environments.

Working Together: Self-Authorship Theory & Intersectionality

Together, self-authorship and intersectionality will aid in describing and analyzing the lived experiences and meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their

social identities. The meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC will be better represented because these approaches helped me understand the internal and external factors affecting participants' meaning-making processes. Lastly, these approaches may assist in retelling how LGBTQ+ POC experience social stigmas while resisting and combatting these contexts through various methods like meaning-making.

Procedures

Participant Selection

Narrative inquirers typically use snowball sampling or purposeful sampling procedures (Abes & Jones, 2004; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Pena-Talamantes, 2013). More specifically, critical narrative inquirers have used snowball sampling to select participants (Duran, 2019). Purposeful sampling assists researchers in selecting participants that optimally fit the criteria for the study (Creswell, 2014), "from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). Snowball sampling is where study participants identify other expert informants who meet the criteria to participate in in-depth interviews (Berg, 2009; Patton, 2009). The current study employed purposeful and snowball sampling methods to attain expert informants who could best address the study's research questions.

Determining the sample size in qualitative research is no simple feat. Too small a sample size may not provide a texturized understanding of a phenomenon and lack saturation (Sandelowski, 1995), which is the process where data collection ends due to no new information emerging (Guest et al., 2006). Too large a sample size may lack detailed contextual information, which is a feature of qualitative research (Sandelowski, 1995).

There are multiple influences that inquirers must consider when determining the sample size for their investigation. Boddy (2016) emphasizes that germane sample sizes depend on the contextual and "scientific paradigm of the research phenomenon being studied" (p. 430). Baker & Edwards (2012) explained how the sample size depends on the breadth and scope of research questions, institutional committee requirements, diversity of population from which the sample is derived, publishing expectations, and theoretical underpinnings of the study. Nevertheless, narrative investigations have selected as few as a single participant (Creswell, 2017) to 31 participants (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Narrative inquirers are typically concerned with context and details (Reissman, 2008); therefore, Andrews et al. (2008) suggest that narrative inquirers select between 8 and 12 participants. Similarly, a critical narrative inquirer selected 12 participants in their investigation (Duran, 2019). Thus, the current investigation will seek a sample of 8 to 12 participants and consider other contextual factors as they emerge.

The current research study is interested in examining the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their stigmatized identities in sociocultural environments. Participants had to meet the following criteria: (1) self-identify as a person a color, meaning non-White or of European descent meets criteria; (2) self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or non-heterosexual; (3) have had experiences of social stigma based on their social identities; (4) engage in concealment and negotiation processes to manage social stigma; (5) be between 18 and 35 years old. I excluded individuals if they did not identify as an LGBTQ+ POC, are under 18 or over 35 years old, and those who have not had experiences of social stigma.

Participant Recruitment

I recruited participants through various methods. I sent recruitment emails to various LGBTQ+ agencies in the United States to recruit participants. Recruitment flyers were provided to these agencies for postage (see Appendix A). Additionally, I used social media announcements to recruit participants (Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, and Gay social apps). The recruitment emails and social media announcements clearly explained the purpose of the research study, listed my contact information, and a link to a Qualtrics survey for people expressing interest. This questionnaire included questions about participants' age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, region, and pseudonym identification. Responses were provided in a multiple-choice format with an open-ended space for self-identification if needed.

As people expressed interest, they completed the Qualtrics survey to screen for potential participants and collect demographic information and informed consent (see Appendix B for emails, social media advertisement, recruitment emails, and recruitment flyer). Thirty-three potential participants completed the demographic and screening Qualtrics survey. Potential participants were excluded and not contacted if they did not meet inclusion criteria. I sought to recruit a diverse sample of LGBTQ+ POC to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences. I also focused on recruiting underrepresented individuals within the LGBTQ+ POC population, like cis- and trans-gender women of color. I emailed seventeen potential participants and received a response back from ten individuals who participated in this investigation (See table 1). I followed up with participants by phone or email to review the purpose of the study, informed consent, answer any questions, and schedule the first interview. All participants were emailed a copy of the inform consent document and were asked to share the recruitment flyer to other individuals who may meet inclusion criteria. I followed up with an additional email, which included Zoom instructions.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Current Residence
Black or African American (4)	Cis-women (4)	Bi-curious (1)	$\bar{x}$ = 26.7	South (6)
Hispanic/Latinx (4)	Cis-men (5)	Bi-sexual (2)	M = 27.5	West (3)
Multiracial (1)	Trans-man (1)	Gay (3)	Min = 19	Northeast (1)
Southwest Asian (1)		Queer (4)	Max = 33	

Note. (n=10); *Aggregate participant demographics used to protect participants confidentiality

Data Collection

Qualitative investigations use various methods to generate data. According to Schwandt (2015), these methods include indirect and direct observations and elicitation. For example, some indirect observations are comprised of archival data, pictures, diaries, and objects. Direct observations include observing events or participants in their natural setting. Elicitation involves interviews, surveys, and focus groups. Literature denotes interviews as one of the most common data collection methods used in narrative investigations (Andrews et al., 2008).

In general, narrative researchers are interested in context and gather an in-depth understanding of participants' storied experiences (Andrews et al., 2008). As a result, narrative investigations typically use multiple forms of data to develop a thorough understanding of the participant's lived experiences (Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, the literature illustrates how narrative investigations use multiple interviews to understand contextual factors and develop relationships with participants (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Multiple interviews help clarify points made and generate more content after parties have reflected on the initial interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Also, a previous narrative investigation centered around LGBTQ+ people and

identity used multiple interviews to collect data (Abes & Jones, 2004). Therefore, the present study used two semi-structured interviews.

Interview Process

I used two semi-structured interviews to generate data about the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC. This method is most appropriate because it helps understand an unknowable reality outside of the researcher's reality (Josselson, 2013), which is, in this case, LGBTQ+ POC realities. Interviews are a co-created space where interviewers ask questions to which participants respond (Josselson, 2013). This co-created process could produce a broad and in-depth understanding of LGBTQ+ POC experiences and the meanings attached to these experiences (Josselson, 2013). These experiences are stored in participants' minds in the configuration of stories that researchers can hear when they ask open-ended questions (Josselson, 2013). The semi-structured interviews assisted me in understanding LGBTQ+ POC experiences of existing in the world. This also helped triangulate the data and add rigor to the research design (Tracy, 2010).

Each interview lasted between 45 mins to 60 mins, where I asked participants open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of their experience. Questions were developed based on similar narrative studies that incorporated self-authorship theory (Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Pizzolato, 2003; Pizzolato, 2005). I also attended to suggestions on crafting interview questions that embody an intersectional framework (Windsong, 2018). The first interview focused on learning as much as possible about participants lived experiences related to social stigma and negotiation/concealment processes (see Appendix C). The interview was transcribed and reviewed before the second interview. The second interview focused on how

participants make sense of their lived experiences related to social stigma and negotiation/concealment processes (see Appendix C). I asked clarifying and follow-up questions to participant's responses. This helped me understand the meanings attached to their lived experiences (Seidman, 1991).

I conducted the interviews via Zoom, a video encrypted communication software. Participants were provided a specific password-protected code to join the interview. This provided an additional level of confidentiality to the research process. A waiting room process was employed to assist me in managing admittance to the interview. I gave participants preference for where they would like to conduct the interviews. However, I encouraged participants to select secluded and private settings with little to no noise in order to protect their privacy. I conducted his interview component in a private home office using a white noise sound machine to guarantee that they will not be overheard during the interview.

As part of the data collection process, all interviews were video recorded within Zoom, then transcribed verbatim using Descript transcription software. I allowed participants to identify a pseudonym, which was used to conduct the interview process and on transcriptions. Transcripts will be formatted in Microsoft Word and stored in my Auburn University Box account, which is duo-password protected.

Data Analysis

To date, there is no recommended data analysis method specific to critical narrative investigations (Duran, 2019). Therefore, I considered data analysis methods used in narrative inquiries. A narrative analysis provides an interpretation of a text that researchers present in a storied form (Reissman, 2008). Reissman (2008) explains four types of analysis used by narrative

inquirers: thematic, structural, dialogic/performative, and visual. Regardless of the data analysis method selected, narrative researchers produce extended accounts, which are sequential and structured through time, place, and sociality (Reissman, 2008). Additionally, narrative inquirers are aware that the collected data is not constant and that "our interpretations of our data are always, and can only ever be, connected to the vantage point from which we view the world…that is forever changing" (Andrews et al., 2008, p. 46).

The majority of previous narrative investigations studying LGBTQ+ people and identity used a thematic analysis method to analyze the data (Abes & Jones, 2004; Duran, 2019; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Pena-Talamantes, 2003). Thus, the current data was analyzed thematically using Braun et al. model. A thematic analysis is a method of analysis where the researcher identifies patterns or themes within the data (Braun et al., 2014). I focused on the "what" rather than the "how" in participants' narratives (Reissman, 2008). I used an inductive approach to analyze the themes. An inductive approach assisted me in understanding the emerging themes from the data. Intersectionality and self-authorship theory assisted me in making sense of the generated data.

Furthermore, Braun et al. (2014) provide a six-phase guideline for analyzing data thematically. These guidelines are not rigid and were flexibly implemented. The first phase is to familiarize yourself with the data. During this process, I reviewed and reread each transcript and watched the video recordings multiple times. I then documented my initial reactions and potential codes in my reflective journal.

The second phase is to generate initial codes (Braun et al., 2014). I used NVivo, a qualitative data analysis computer software, to organize and analyze the generated data. I uploaded all transcripts to NVivo to begin generating initial codes. To analyze the data thematically, I used narrative coding for the first coding cycle and pattern coding for the second coding cycle. Narrative

codes aid in exploring people's lived experiences through stories (Saldana, 2009), with particular attention to defining and describing people, places, events, and relational dynamics through time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This coding mechanism is relevant for inquires investigating people's lived experiences, studies rooted in critical/feminist paradigms, and identity development studies (Saldana, 2009). During this coding cycle, I went line by line using a word or a short phrase to code relevant portions of text. I often coded the same portion of text in a different manner. I was perceptive to the people, places, and events described in participants stories, while being aware of my research questions, philosophical assumptions, and theoretical foundations. I wrote in my reflective journal as I completed this coding cycle for each transcript to document emerging thoughts and personal reactions to the data. I generated 563 narratives codes, which were applied to 1581 quotes from participants stories.

For the second coding cycle, I implemented pattern coding for each individual transcript. Pattern codes help researchers identify themes from the initial codes generated, which creates a more cohesive and meaningful unit of analysis (Saldana, 2009). To facilitate this coding cycle, I searched each transcript for similarly coded data, grouped like results together, and assigned them a pattern code. I consistently utilized my reflective journal to aid in making decisions about which narrative codes to group and assign a pattern code. This process involved several rounds of recoding and reclassifying of data. I consulted with my peer debriefer during this process to address emerging questions surrounding how I was making sense of the data.

Next, the third phase involves searching for themes (Braun et al., 2014). This undertaking encompasses critically thinking about the similarities and differences among patterned codes and condensing them into categories to generate themes (Saldana, 2009). This is where researchers "begin to transcend the reality of your data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and

theoretical" (Saldana, 2009, p. 11). I engaged in more critical reflexivity and drew mind maps to assist me in gaining a deeper understanding of the data. After engaging in this process, each transcript was assigned between 5 to 7 initial themes.

The fourth phase includes two levels of reviewing themes. The first level involves reviewing all coded data and themes for coherence for each individual transcript (Braun et al., 2014). I completed this level by reading all coded data and themes for congruence. I engaged in a continuous loop of refining themes, recoding and decoding data, created new themes, and collapse themes into subthemes, while still using my reflexive journal to triangulate emerging findings. Level two entails analyzing the data across the entire data set (Braun et al., 2014). I again reviewed all of the themes across the entire data set for coherence, and selected themes that fit within my conceptual map and reflected the meaning of the data set as a whole. I continuously reflected on my research questions, philosophical assumptions, and theoretical frameworks to guide my decision making.

The fifth phase is defining and naming themes (Braun et al., 2014). I refined the names of each theme and define them in the context of my research questions and theoretical frameworks. I selected "concise" and "punchy" names to "give the reader a sense of what the theme is about" (Braun et al., p. 93). At the conclusion of this phase, I sent my peer debriefer my generated themes, definitions, and corresponding excerpts for feedback. Next, we discussed their feedback, my data analysis process, and questions I had concerning my themes. To further triangulate the data, I implemented member reflections by sending participants the overall generated themes, definitions, and their corresponding excerpts for feedback. Five out of ten participants responded to the email request for feedback. All five concurred with the generated themes and how their stories were reflected. One participant revised some of their excerpts for clarity.

The sixth phase is producing the final report. I organized the major themes in temporal sequence (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), which is in consistent with the overall generated findings. Additionally, I used intersectionality and self-authorship as my interpretive lens to explain the experiences of the ten LGBTQ+ POC participants.

Promoting Credibility

Engaging in high-quality qualitative research helps communicate understanding, goodness, utility, and distinction from quantitative research (Tracy, 2010). This distinction is warranted because qualitative work is interpretive, and the researcher is the instrument (Creswell, 2017). Therefore, when making judgments about the "validity" of qualitative investigations, it is essential to determine if credibility is achieved (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Tracy (2010) refers to credibility as finding the researcher trustworthy and the results plausible and persuasive. Also, credibility focuses on the analysis process, which leads the reader to "act on or make decisions in line with" the interpretations discovered (Tracy, 2010, P. 843). Credibility can be consummated through various procedures like thick descriptions, triangulation or crystallization, audit trails, peer reviews, and member checking (Bloor, 2001; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tracy, 2010). The procedures used largely depend on the philosophical assumptions guiding the researcher's investigation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thus, I explain how I achieved credibility and maintained integrity throughout this investigation by implementing a pilot study, bracketing interview, reflexive journal, member reflections, peer debriefing, and using thick descriptions to triangulate the data.

Pilot Study

During the early developments of this study, I conducted a pilot study with a LGBTQ+ POC to improve my interview skills and to test the soundness of my research questions. Pilot studies allow researchers to make changes and revisions prior to the main study (Kim, 2011). After completing the interview, I transcribed the recorded interview verbatim and used the six-phase guideline developed by Braun et al. (2014) to thematically analyze the interview. The themes that emerged were related to heteronormativity, lack of family support, intersectional invisibility, and finding supportive networks. As a result of this pilot study, I changed some of my interview protocol questions prior to ensure I captured participants meaning-making structures.

Bracket Interview

After I received IRB approval, and prior to data generation methods, I participated in a bracketing interview conducted by my peer debriefer. This interview afforded me the space to explore and understand my own subjectivity in relation to the current research study as an LGBTQ+ POC who has experienced social stigma. As a result of this interview, I gained greater insight into my experiences of social stigma, negotiation and concealment processes, and meaning-making filters. Becoming aware of the metaphysical, equipped me with knowledge regarding how I could potentially influence the co-constructed interviews. At the completion of the interview, I debriefed with my peer debriefer and reflected on this experience in my journal.

Reflexive Journal

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Creswell, 2017). This means that qualitative researchers are individuals collecting, interpreting, and analyzing emerging data. They do not utilize instruments like in quantitative research methods. As a result of this, qualitative

researchers must engage in reflexivity. Reflexivity is a process where researchers disclose their subjectivity and how it informs their research design (Creswell, 2017). However, researchers emphasize that reflexivity encompasses more than disclosing one's subjectivity (Bettez, 2015). Specifically, Subedi (2006) explains the need for engaging in reflexivity that questions "what and how one knows and how one has been accountable to practices of representations" (p. 575). Similarly, Bettez (2015) argues for a critically reflexive approach that critiques what we know while being aware of the varying ideologies governing various audiences to create equitable practices. Therefore, due to qualitative researchers being the instrument, they must engage in critical reflexive work that questions their interpretations and their effects on the entire research design. These procedures will help crystalize the data analysis because of the various methods employed, adding rigor to this investigation.

The current study investigates the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities within sociocultural environments. Throughout this research investigation, I engaged in critical reflexivity and documented my experiences in a journal. Reflexive journals help researchers track their growth and change throughout the research design and how they make sense of it (Ortlipp, 2008). As the principal researcher in this study, I am aware that I am a queer person of color who may share similar social stigma experiences and discrimination. While there are social implications for holding certain identities, I know that people have various intersecting identities that may tell a different story. In my reflexive journal, I included personal, methodological, and theoretical memos to document how I made sense of my overall investigation and data, which guided my analysis process and final written report. Saldana (2009) provided twelve reflective questions to aid in writing analytic memos:

1. Reflect on and write about how you personally relate to the participants and/or the phenomenon.
2. Reflect on or write about the study's research questions.
3. Reflect on and write about your code choices and their operational definitions.
4. Reflect on and write about the emergent categories, themes, patterns, and concepts.
5. Reflect on and write about the possible networks (links, connections, overlaps, flows) among the codes, patterns, themes, categories, concepts. (Think about cause-and-effect relationships, possible hierarchies, chronology, influences, and affects)
6. Reflect on and write about an emergent or relating existing theory.
7. Reflect on and write about any problems with the study.
8. Reflect on and write about any personal and ethical dilemmas with the study.
9. Reflect on and write about future directions of the study.
10. Reflect on and write about the analytical memos generated thus far.
11. Reflect on and write about the final report for the study.

I reflected on these questions throughout the entire research investigation. I also included how social, cultural, historical, political, and ideological structures shaped my interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000), which is consistent with the critical paradigm undergirding this investigation. Overall, this reflexive journal provided justification for the research decisions made in this study.

Peer Debriefer

I utilized a peer debriefer during the data analysis process to provide support and a rigorous critique of the methods and interpretations generated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My peer debriefer is a Black cisgender heterosexual woman who is knowledgeable in the methods and theoretical

frameworks I implemented. I selected this peer debriefer because she has divergent intersecting social identities compared to myself, which provides her with a unique epistemological and ontological perspective of the world. Her alternative worldviews and philosophical assumptions added rigor and complexity to the data analysis process and final themes generated. I incorporated my peer debriefer prior to collecting data. My peer debriefer facilitated a bracket interview to help me understand my subjectivity and how it influences the interview process. I consulted with her throughout the analysis portion to address emerging questions surrounding how I was making sense of the data. Additionally, I consulted and debriefed with my peer after generating the initial themes.

Member Reflections

Member reflections were implemented to enrich the quality and depth of the data analysis process. Member reflections promote collaboration and discussion with participants who can critique findings (Thomas, 2017). I did not implement this practice to validate research findings to attain a single truth or reality (Tracy, 2010), which is antithetical to the critical paradigm embedded in this investigation. In contrast, this researcher employs member reflections for more data, reflection, collaboration, and complexity (Tracy, 2010). Therefore, member reflections align with this study's aim because it does not further marginalize participants by silencing their perspectives (Creswell & Miller, 2010). In fact, it reduces the power imbalances within the research process because it allows for collaboration (Creswell & Miller, 2010). After generating the initial themes, I sent participants a copy of the themes, definitions, and corresponding quotes to seek their feedback. This helped to further triangulate the data and add depth to the narratives represented, which are not static but continuously shaped by social, political, and cultural forces.

Ethical Considerations

I fulfilled all of Auburn University's Institutional Review Board's ethical and legal requirements. I used pseudonyms, fictitious identifiable details, and a password-protected storage drive to protect participants' confidentiality. Additionally, qualitative researchers must examine other ethical considerations to accommodate emerging data. These specific considerations include parameters for informed consent and anonymity.

In qualitative research, it is difficult to fully inform participants about what to expect due to the study design's "emerging" nature (Robinson & Curry, 2009). As a result, researchers may not know what themes will arise or what questions they will ask (Robinson & Curry, 2009). Other ethical issues related to informed consent, like confidentiality and anonymity, could occur (Bhattacharya, 2007; Berg & Lune, 2011). In qualitative research, it is difficult to maintain anonymity because the participants are known to the researcher (Berg & Lune, 2011; Haverkamp, 2005). Similarly, Bhattacharya (2007) states, "the formal consent form can only serve as a fluid guideline that gets contested and negotiated throughout the research process" (p. 1111). Therefore, Berg & Lune (2011) emphasize the utility of using social contracts to form research relationships and continuously negotiate and discuss emerging informed consent and other issues. I embodied this suggestion to ensure the protection of participants during this process by forming egalitarian relationships and using member reflections.

Researcher Subjectivity

My research topic is related to gaining contextual knowledge about the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC and their meaning-making capacity. The way that I conceptualize social stigma,

negotiation and concealment processes, and meaning-making is inextricably linked to my social identities as a queer person of color. I am also aware that my subjectivity is "like a garment and cannot be removed…it is insistently present in both the research and non-research aspects of life" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Therefore, it is important to discuss my subjectivity openly and honestly because it influences the entire research process.

To begin with, I engaged in lots of uncomfortable reflexive work prior to, and during, this research investigation. For example, I critically thought about my own experiences of existing in stigmatizing sociocultural environments and how I still engage in negotiation and concealment processes. I remember growing up and being stigmatized and called names because of my dark skin tone by individuals within my ethnic-racial community. I remember being called gay because I did not conform to the hypermasculine norms of society. I remember being victimized by White police officers in Columbus, GA. I remember being told, "you are the smartest Black guy I have ever met," by well-meaning colleagues. I had to relive and remember so many of these experiences that were caused by intersecting oppressive systems, like heterosexism and racism.

Experiencing social stigma and discrimination have impacted me in many ways. As an example, I became used to constantly questioning myself. However, I never really internalize these external messages that I encounter in the world, as much as I used to. I externalize what I was experiencing. I see these experiences as problems of being in the world in relation to others but not as an inherent deficit in myself. These conflicts are due to these intersecting oppressive systems. My meaning-making structures were influenced by some of the lessons my late mother taught me, finding community, and the education I received in my masters and PhD program. These meaning-making structures allowed me to engage in negotiation strategies while not seeing my actions as a reflection of who I am.

I know that my experiences may parallel those of my participants. However, I know that there are stark differences due to the intersections of our other social identities. For example, I grew up in a lower socioeconomic environment. My father became incarcerated when I was 7 years old and he was released when I was 27. In addition, for most of my childhood, an addiction to crack cocaine incapacitated my mother. These experiences alone impact how I understand myself, my beliefs, and my relationships to others. My parents' stories encompassed themes related to discrimination, limited opportunities, nonexistent mentors, and a paucity of emotional and financial support. Despite these experiences, my parents were resilient with the crummy cards life dealt them. Thus, my early life experiences and my parents' stories fueled a fire from deep within: a fire for helping and advocating for others who are not provided the same opportunities in our society to self-actualize. This personal value influences my research activities and philosophical assumptions. I believe in knowledge and reality being shaped by hegemonic systems of oppression that we must dismantle. I now understand the ways in which I experience privilege and feel that it is my duty to advocate for others. This axiological positioning is how my research topic developed.

To develop my dissertation proposal, I had to understand what I wanted to investigate and if these topics were worthy of in-depth research. I considered research topics related to diversity, equity, and agency, but I still had a limited understanding of my own knowledge gaps in these areas. It was not until I read about Nigel Shelby's story that a research topic and question developed. Nigel Shelby was a high school student who completed suicide after experiencing constant anti-gay bullying. Reading about this tragic incident encouraged me to reflect on the interlocking systems of oppression that Nigel experienced as a self-identifying, LGBTQ+ youth of color. In turn, I reflected on my personal experiences as a queer Black man. Through these

reflexive moments, I felt compelled to take action through my research activities. After reviewing relevant literature and engaging in more reflexivity, I developed a research question.

After developing my research question, I continued to review the literature and engage in more reflexivity. This process included reflecting on how my subjectivity informs my entire research process, the philosophical assumptions underlining my research, why I selected a critical narrative methodology, how I crafted my research questions, and the decisions made during the data collection and analysis processes. I also asked myself the interview questions and journaled about my experiences. All of these experiences, which informed my investigation, is highlighted in my reflective journal.

Peshkin (1988) states that while our subjectivity cannot be removed, it can inform our research investigation without having biased implications if we are aware and transparent about our positioning. My experience being in the world is entangled in knowing and the production of knowledge, therefore, it is important to note the three assumptions guiding my research process: (1) LGBTQ+ POC may experience interlocking forms of social stigma that impact their wellbeing, (2) LGBTQ+ POC are irreducible beings who find ways to resist subordination while negotiating their identities in stigmatizing sociocultural environments, and (3) LGBTQ+ POC have varying unique experiences of existence due to numerous contextual factors. I provided a glimpse into my subjectivity to remove the guise of the research process and to aid readers in understanding my research decisions. Engaging in critical reflexivity allowed me to consider dialectical oppositions and remain curious about participants stories throughout the entire research investigations.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explain the research design used to investigate the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their social identities within stigmatizing

sociocultural environments. In this chapter, I explained the methods and procedures used to answer the research questions guiding this investigation. I also provided rationales to support the research decisions made related to methodology, participant recruitment, and data collection and data analysis procedures. The chapter that follows describes the research findings.

Chapter 3: Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities within sociocultural contexts. The following research questions guided this critical narrative inquiry:

1. What are the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?
2. What are the meaning-making structures and embedded cultural resources of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?

In this chapter, I delineate the findings that emerged from ten participants' shared meaning-making experiences while negotiating and concealing their stigmatized social identities within varied sociocultural environments. I incorporated a rigorous narrative thematic analysis of twenty interview transcripts. I used intersectionality and self-authorship theory as my interpretive lens to develop the themes and explain the findings. The following major themes materialized from this undertaking: (a) *Pervasive Interactions with Oppressive Systems*, (b) *Situational Decision-Making Process*, (c) *Stigma Management Strategies Means Adapting*, (d) *Affirming Contextual Influences*, (e) *Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter*, (f) *Meaning-Made within Oppressive Systems to Dismantle Internalized Oppression*. Most of these themes included subthemes, which I described below.

Overview of Major Themes

In the corresponding section, I defined the major themes and subthemes, included participant excerpts, and discussed the relevance of the findings. I arranged the major themes in

temporal sequence to illustrate meaning-meaning development as participants negotiate their stigmatizing social identities within different sociocultural environments. Although I organized the major themes temporally, this process is not rigid or static. Participants transitioned between themes based on a myriad of factors.

As an overview, participants in this study began by describing *pervasive interactions with oppressive systems* that set-in motion the *situational decision-making process*. This process is where participants considered several factors of whether to negotiate, conceal, or disclose their stigmatized social identity. After deciding to negotiate or conceal their stigmatized social identity, the next theme emerged: *stigma management strategies means adapting*. In this theme, participants described implementing different methods to manage social stigma. As participants engaged in these adaptive methods, they found *affirming contextual influences* that aided in their development of a *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter*. These influences also included embedded cultural strengths. The aforementioned filter helped participants screen external messages to make internally driven meaning out of themselves and others. Following this meaning-making activity, the last theme*, meaning-made within oppressive structures to dismantle internalized oppression*, emerged This theme describes the global meaning-making structures participants crafted to understand themselves, others, and what they believe. These structures helped participants avoid internalized oppression. In the corresponding section, I discuss the first theme, *pervasive interactions with oppressive systems.*

Pervasive Interactions with Oppressive Systems

Pervasive interactions with oppressive systems unearth the power structures influencing participants' decisions to negotiate and conceal their identities. These power structures could

potentially impact how participants make sense of themselves, others, and their beliefs. Participants voiced oppressive systems like racism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, and xenophobia as impacting their lived experiences. All participants described widespread encounters with oppressive systems occurring in multiple sociocultural environments. It is important to note that social groups perpetuate oppressive systems and are not inherently stigmatizing. Two subthemes emerged, *explicit: experiences of socialization and discrimination* and *implicit: intersectional invisibility and dissonance,* which captures the features of these power structures.

Explicit: Experiences of socialization and discrimination. *Explicit: Experiences of socialization and discrimination* details participants' encounters of stigmatizing messages, expectations, and unjust treatment due to their socially denigrated identities. Participants primarily focused on heterosexist messages, expectations, and experiences from different social contexts across the lifespan. However, some of their stories capture other oppressive systems, like racism, cissexism, and xenophobia.

Participants reflected on encountering stigmatizing messages, expectations, and unjust experiences from family members, peers, religious institutions, and broader society. Participants described indirect or direct situations. As a whole, these encounters are obvious ramifications of holding devalued social identities within oppressive systems—all of these sociocultural context's help create and maintain oppressive systems of power. For example, Miguel, one of the participants, generally expressed the heterosexist messages he experienced in various contexts.

> I think in general, like definitely all those pieces from like friends and family and obviously like media. For me, it was like, yeah this is something that I'm never going to tell anyone, that I have these sexual attractions towards men.

All of the participants shared experiencing stigmatizing messages, expectations, and unjust treatment by family members. For example, Jaz reflected on hearing "homophobic" comments from her mother. She shared, "my mom would always make faces or comments, I think she low-key is, actually not low-key, I think she is homophobic. She makes comments about movies and some songs." Similarly, Dee shared,

> Even growing up my aunt on my dad's side, she made a comment, she was like, "yeah, I know y'all boys don't need to be gay cause y'all know your uncles or your dad is going to have a fit." That made it worse.

Emily spoke of homophobic comments she experienced from family members growing up. She inherently denotes having an awareness of heteronormativity.

> I remember, homophobic comments being made as jokes from my grandfather or my uncles to each other. They were always in Spanish. So, I just kind of realized, oh, that's something that's like, no matter what it was, I just always knew it was a negative context.

Mikail described transphobic and homophobic messages he's heard from his mother during his formative years. He also shared a time where he was stigmatized by his mother because he failed to meet dominant masculine norms.

> Growing up the only in-person experiences I had were, um, trans workers at makeup salons. And even then, whenever I saw them, I saw nothing wrong with them, but my mom would be like, oh, don't look at them, don't touch them…it's been hard because my mom growing up. She always be like, change the way how you walk it's too girly, it's disgusting, or change the way how you talk or junior years when I started growing up my hair and she'd be like, you look like a woman, like stop you disgust me. I don't like the way how you look… My sister asked my mom, "what if one of us did come out as gay?" She was just

like, “I wouldn't love it. That'd be a dead child to me” is what she said and how she would rather die than find out that one of our kids are gay. And that kind of like, I guess destroyed me like realistically, because that's not something you want to hear from your mom.

Comparably, Tremaine shared how his mother called him “soft” growing up.

> One of the things that my mom would say growing up, and she regrets it so much to this day is she always called me real soft. She thought that I was really soft. She was like, “I'm a gonna put you in a game so they can toughen you up” because it was the whole idea of like you're too soft. “I'm gonna make you go live with your brother and your daddy, so that they can toughen you up.”

Camila spoke of the gender and heterosexual expectations she experienced from family members during her formative years. Her narrative highlights the maintenance of heteronormativity.

> I was visiting family up North, and I was eating food like a child does, and wasn't thinking anything of it and just sitting comfortably and, she was an aunt or cousin, they all become the same things in my family at some point, um, had mentioned to cross your legs, you shouldn't be eating with your mouth open, you need to be ladylike. So all of these comments made on top of like this assumption that I would be heterosexual. So then am I not conforming to this idea of a woman?

Kelvin reflected on the heteronormative messages he experienced from his best friend. He shared, “I don't know, like just with my best friend, I used to tell her about me, but of course she's super religious. She's like, you need to pray that out. You need to get that out of you.”

In contrast, two participants highlighted the impact of racism and cissexism in their interactions with family members. For instance, Miguel spoke of the racist within-group messages he heard from his mother about darker skinned Latinx individuals.

> My mom was very much so, what's the right word? Like favored whiteness. It's due to her social location. In Peru, there's still a lot of discrimination against indigenous people and like Black people in Peru. So, we're lighter skin. I think when you transfer that here, there's that within group thing happening with my mom…she would talk negatively about other nationalities from South America. And so, whiteness, I think was the thing to strive for a little bit.

Esequiel reflected on being misgendered by family members, which support the continuous functioning of cissexism. He expressed, "My dad's mom, my grandma, she still calls me by my birth name. It's insane. She's still use she for me, and as a result, the rest of the family, if they're around her, will too."

Participants shared heteronormative messages they encountered within religious institutions. Tremaine reflected, "I heard the whole notion of you're going to hell if you're gay in church." Kelvin expressed how he heard in "pastors messages you going to hell." Camila spoke of hearing these same messages in church as she gained awareness of her queer identity.

> I'm starting to kind of recognize some attraction to people other than men. And now I'm going to church twice a week and hearing this message that I'm going to hell and that I am not acceptable and that I am doing the wrong thing.

Similarly, Esequiel shared,

> So we'd go to church then, or kind of like Sunday school for Catholic children that don't go to like Catholic school. We had to take these special classes, and then after that they indoctrinate us into Catholicism. In church, I knew that if you weren't married, sex is bad. I already knew that I wasn't supposed to be fantasizing about these girls when I was young.

Several participants described encountering stigmatizing messages, expectations, and discrimination in educational institutions. For example, Emily reflected on hearing heterosexist messages from peers in elementary and middle school. She explained how terms like, "gay" were used to denigrate others.

> I remember in like elementary and middle school, primarily around those years, the word gay was used as an insult and it was just like, "oh, you're gay, you're fruity" or whatever it is; and just kind of like putting someone down in that way.

Jaz spoke of witnessing punitive actions by school officials if students failed to meet heteronormative standards.

> There were lesbian couples in the school, but they still got fussed at and like, you know, and told "you're not allowed to be this close and you can't kiss in the halls," and it now has to be a whole policy.

More recently, Mikail described daily xenophobic experiences in college. He shared,

> They always happen…they happen all the time. Even last semester, I was literally banned from an app for my chemistry class, because of my name and it triggered a warning for the US Bureau of Security, like just stuff like that just happens regularly now.

He then reflected on a specific experience of discrimination based on his "origin."

> Did I experience some discrimination from professors? Yeah. But it wasn't on my sexuality. It was just on my origin. One time, we have opportunities to resubmit an assignment. So, I literally copied pasted his comments. Most of my writing was his words, almost a hundred percent of his words. And I still didn't get credit for that assignment. He started critiquing his own writing...so that professor was just awful. He literally made me feel so dumb about myself. Like, I can't write, is it cause of the language barrier? I know there is no language

> barrier. I understand English. I'm fluent. He said, “I don't think you read it right. You misunderstood the language. It actually means A, B, C, D, E.” And I was just like, oh my God, you are not going to be talking about my language barrier. At first, I was shocked…then my best friend who like took almost all classes with me showed me her writing. She was like, Mikail, our writing's the same. You have less typos than I do. And he pointed out none of my typos, he pointed out every single one of yours.

Other participants discussed stigmatizing messages and discrimination experiences in other contexts. Emily spoke of hearing heterosexist messaging in media. She shared, “things that were on TV, things on the radio when we're driving around. All of that together is basically why I feel like I was scared.” Esequiel discussed experiencing racial “micro- and macro aggressions at work.”

> I guess it's shown up a lot when it comes to my work identity, which dictates a lot of my life. So, I feel like that's where most of the ethnic, race, and culture, has come into play is in fucking micro and macro aggressions at work.

Tremaine shared a story where he experienced racial microaggressions from older white men while attending a fundraiser.

> I think it was a fundraiser, and these older white guys came up to us, we were minding our business. And just because of the color of my skin, they said, “I bet you're an Obama supporter”, and actually told quite racist jokes, like, “what side of the hand is this? Oh, this is the work inside hand, this hand isn't the work inside because it's darker” or, “oh, y'all been in the sun too long”…And of course we hear all the undertones of racism that people don't really realize that they are really being racist in those instances like, “oh, I got a tan this weekend, I'm almost as dark as you.” I’m like, “you're never going to be.” Or, “your hair softer than I thought it was going to be.”

Esequiel reflected on the intersections of his identities as a queer trans man and how discrimination may occur.

> It's interesting, my intersections, because when I transitioned, people don't usually think I'm trans, people just sometimes will read me as a gay man, occasionally if I'm by myself. And so, what I'll end up having to deal with is more like being called fag or these kinds of things…It's hard being a man. It's so much isolation that I wasn't prepared for.

Lastly, Emily shared an experience of discrimination based on her sexual and affectional identity while on the bus with her girlfriend during Pride weekend. Her narrative suggests how oppressive systems reward individuals meeting dominant group norms and punishes defiant individual's.

> I know there was one time where it was Pride weekend. So, everybody in San Francisco has Pride flags. And it's very clear that all these people that are on the bus are going to, or from the parade. And so that weekend, I felt comfortable showing my girlfriend the same affection that I would normally, if we weren't in public, because I realized that there were so many people that were celebrating Pride and were okay with lesbian couples. So, I felt like comfortable enough to do that. And we were on the bus and this lady said something under her breath right next to us. And we were by the door and the bus was still going, I just tend to ignore people, and so does my girlfriend, like, we'll just ignore them because they will just make these comments anyways. So when she realized she was being ignored, she started talking louder. And then that's when I realized she was saying something about like religion. She was just like, "he wouldn't be okay with this, you're sinning," and going along those lines. And again, we were ignoring her, acting like we couldn't hear her. My girlfriend and I were visibly uncomfortable at this point, but we kind of tried to keep

> talking. And then the lady touches my arm. And I think at that point, it was a boundary that hadn't been crossed before. I feel like I'm okay with ignoring people, because I know that people have their own perceptions, but when she touched my arm, I felt like there was such a reality of like, okay, I can be in danger.

All participants elucidated experiences of socialization and discrimination. Participants encountered these experiences in varying sociocultural contexts, over multiple points in their lives. These contexts help perpetuate and preserve oppressive systems. While oppressive systems cause explicit experiences as such, participant narratives also uncovered the implicit features of these power structures. Subtheme*, Implicit: Intersectional invisibility and dissonance*, is presented and elaborated on in the section that follows.

Implicit: Intersectional invisibility and dissonance. *Implicit: Intersectional invisibility and dissonance* describes the insidious impacts of oppressive systems on participants as a result of their interlocking social identities. Participant narratives suggested that they felt unseen and experienced internal conflict as a result of their stigmatized intersecting identities. For instance, several participants shared their experiences interacting in queer white spaces. Esequiel spoke of the lack of "racial talk" in white queer spaces, which reflects feeling unseen in the wholeness of his experience as a queer person of color. He reflected, "and so, I guess that changed cause like when I would go to queer areas, it was like, you're gay, like all of this, but no racial talk, no talk about culture, these kinds of things." Miguel discussed this same intersectional invisibility he experienced in white queer spaces.

> And then here in LA it's like, you all wanna listen to Britney Spears and Dua Lipa. I'm like Kylie Minogue, yes great, but also what can we do a little bit different? I mean even when I talk about white people, when they're annoying and like do messed up things, I just want

> to talk freely about it, but you can't really do that unless this person has done the work and completely understands it, and is not going to internalize it. And so that's not a lot of the white people here. They'll be like, “oh, I'm liberal, voted for Joe Biden.” But if you mentioned anything like that, it might still be a little bit of defensiveness. I might look at you a different way. So that's a piece of it as well.

In contrast, Camila described feeling unseen and frustrated in ethnic-racial spaces due to being a multiracial queer woman.

> I have been in a lot of spaces that have been predominantly Black, socializing, and something has been said related to like immigrants or Latin X individuals, or even sometimes like queer folks or a lack of understanding about like a gender nonconforming, gender queer folks. That's been frustrating and also upsetting because it's like, I'm in a space where I'm affirming, like who I am racially, but then all these other identities I hold are not as affirmed or supported here.

Other participants described experiencing intersectional cognitive dissonance, which is an implicit impact of living within oppressive systems. Participants often highlighted this dissonance with questions. Kelvin described the intersections of being a Black bi-curious man as a “battle.” He reflected,

> You know, being like this, we at risk the most for a lot of things. So being Black is one, then identifying in the community is another thing too. Its like a ticking bomb. It's a battle between two and I'm just like, hmm, now what?

Dee described the conflict he experiences between his Christian and gay identity.

> Religion and my life, those two together, it's like a big battle. I just rather watch from a distance (laughs)… It's just a big balance that I'm trying to understand…But at the end of

> the day, I'm still learning my identity in him, in his eye. So it's a process I'm trying to understand. I'm yet learning… So, it's one of those clashes and shit. I'm still learning

Similarly, Kelvin reflected on this intersection when he discussed his "spiritual gifts."

> I'm very much so involved and I'm in church and I know I have spiritual gifts, so I always had to question that area too. What do I do with this?...and even in the Bible, you know, gifts and callings are without repentance. And I was always questioning that too. I was like, so I'm out here living like a double standard life as people say, and I'm still also getting dreams and visions in mornings. I'm just like, so what am I supposed to do with these now? God, what's the plan?

Mikail shared the disharmony he experienced as an immigrant gay man.

> You know, like the dying circle when you get on Macs, a little rainbow circle? That was my brain, the first few months in America. I discovered this thing that I definitely am, but then I'm also in this fear of people who kind of know that I'm not from here. So, I was already kind of alienated and the way how I presented myself, I don't remember it. But my friends later on told me like, no, you're like very feminine.

Camila discussed being aware of this intersectional dissonance and how it is systemically roots.

> So, yeah, it was just a lot of confusion and that's what positionality does. We have all these different identities that kind of morphed together to form who we are. But unfortunately, I'm navigating a society where a lot of those categories, those positions are systemically oppressed. So, it's like how do you find out who you are if it's unacceptable to the broad society, and then even closer to me, who I'm interacting with, most of those people as well.

In sum, participants described widespread interactions with oppressive systems. Their narratives emphasized the explicit and implicit methods used by these systems with the ultimate

goal of subjugating, forcing change, and silencing divergent experiences. These power structures caused the emergence of the theme, *situational decision-making process*.

Situational Decision-Making Process

Pervasive interactions with oppressive systems gave rise to *situational decision-making process.* These systems caused participants to assess and make decisions about their devalued social identities within various sociocultural environments. Therefore, *situational decision-making process* describes what participants think about when deciding if they will negotiate, conceal, or disclose their social identities within sociocultural contexts. More specifically, participants discussed decision-making processes with family, and other social interactions. This theme uncovers the situational and context-dependent aspects of decisions to negotiate and conceal, including: the level of physical and emotional safety, trust and valuing of a interpersonal relationship, negative consequences, and securing a long-term relationship.

Furthermore, participants described their decisions making process with significant and non-significant others. Some participants seemed more prone to negotiate or conceal their sexual and affectional identity around family members because they valued this interpersonal relationship more than others. For example, Camila reflected on this as she discussed proximity, and valuing the relationship she has with her parents over distant family relationships.

> I think I valued the relationships I have with my parents probably more and how they perceive me because I am there child versus like this aunt who I wouldn't say we have a very close relationship or cousins who I see once every three years or some cousins, I don't even know the name of because we have so many family members across the nation and in Puerto Rico and other countries. So, I feel like in interacting with them, it's like you're meeting some people for the first time again. So, I feel like there's almost never a

> consideration for me. I don't think it comes across my mind compared to when I was with my parents. We're always interacting and I'm living with you at some point. And I call them like at least two, three times a week, even still today. So, there was a lot more of them that they knew me a lot more and I knew them a lot more. So, there was more of a relationship there that I felt was in danger in some way, compared to some of these other relationships with family members.

Camila elaborated on concealing her queer identity with her father than in other social interactions, and settings.

> That's probably one area of my life in which I do still feel some type of concealment or there's like some hidden portion of that there. I think I'm like maybe 90% authentic in terms of that specific relationship. Whereas in most other areas of my life, I'm closer to a hundred, I would say. Even in like, as far as work. The first day of classes, whenever I'm speaking with the students, I let them know right away.

Similarly, Emily shared this same valuing of family relationships as influencing her decision to negotiate her bisexual identity with them versus other social interactions.

> I think because of what a big value like family is to us, and I know that friends can be temporary, people that I see on the bus that want to be hurtful in some way are temporary. I think that my family is permanent and will always be there. It's almost like unconditional. If it's a stranger, anybody, then I'm very clear and I'm able to mention that because I don't really care to make them uncomfortable with that. I feel like it's a fact. It's who I am. And if they're going to feel uncomfortable, then that's just like a relationship that I don't need.

In contrast, Mikail spoke of grave consequences guiding his decision to conceal his stigmatized gay identity with family members. He also implicitly mentioned the impact of culture and collectivism affecting decisions to conceal his identity.

> I'm going to act who I am, except when it comes to my family members because the risk, when it comes to my family members. I'm still under my mom's immigration case. I'm not on my own independent one. So, if I did come out, she will surely ship me back to Malaysia with my dad who is just as religious and just as strict. And I don't want to put that burden. And my grandma regularly reminds me that I'm the one that holds the family honor out of like the 15 cousins that I have.

Some participants described the importance of physical and emotional safety in interpersonal interactions as influencing their decision to negotiate or conceal their identities. Esequiel reflected, “it’s just not safe in some areas.” Miguel also expressed having to consider his physical safety while living in an affirming city to make negotiation and concealment decisions in general social interactions.

> I really don't have to think twice about like disclosing my sexual orientation. It's just like being gay is like normal here…But also reflecting on it a little bit more, I don't always feel like a hundred percent myself here. And I think its like due to a perceived sense of safety, I guess that's the word. And so, if I perceive I'll be safe in an environment, yeah, I am hundred percent of myself. But if I feel like not, then that's going to influence how I act.

Mikail implicitly mentioned the significance of physical safety in assessing for perceived sense of prejudice in general social interactions.

> I like censor myself is just like, I can't be this way towards this person because they're going to have this prejudice, which could end up biting me in the butt. So just like the

different experiences I realize how different people react. I kind of test the waters with each person with my personality, whether it's just like a hundred percent me or it's just like a very diluted me. So, it was just kind of testing out the waters where I realized how people would perceive me and how I want to be perceived by certain people and yeah.

In contrast, Jaz spoke of emotional safety dictating her decision to negotiate or conceal multiple intersecting social identities with her mother.

> But it’s about emotional safety. I don't feel like I will be physically harmed, but I do feel like I'll be judged, and it will cause me a lot of emotional exhaustion just to try to explain myself to death. And I already feel like I have to explain in other aspects, like she still expects me to be a doctor and it's like, I said no to the medical school admissions, it's not going to happen. My mom doesn't even know I'm a pole dancer and I've been dancing for over two years. And she probably gonna find out now because I have a lot of relatives that follow me on my main page, and it is what it is.

Emily also described emotional safety impacting her decision to negotiate her social identity with family members. She mentions how her decision-making process is situational.

> It also has to do with like how comfortable I feel, and some days, I feel a lot more comfortable with myself than other days. It's like wherever my mental state is that day. If I'm feeling a little weaker or sad or whatever, I'm not going to push that boundary because I know that if anything happens, and it's not the best reaction, like I'm not going to be able to handle it, and it would not be helpful for my mental health. So yeah, definitely analyzing the situation of like who I'm talking to, but also how I'm feeling like what process I think that they're in definitely, what process I'm in. It’s very situational.

For other participants, a felt sense of trust influenced their decision-making process. For example, Dee shared the importance of trust in deciding when to negotiate, conceal, or disclose his gay identity in general social interactions.

> It's more so trust. If I can't trust you with something as little as telling you this, without you going around telling the whole world, then that's a problem… only told people who I trust and felt comfortable with. And I guess that's how I am now.

Comparably, Tremaine reflected,

> So, if it is a person that I don't trust as much, or I don't know them as well, I'm not even going to behave in a way that would allude to me being gay. So, I think about this one time I was in Dallas with some friends, and they were all gay friends. There were strangers that I didn't know that were friends of friends and because I didn't know the friends of friends. I was more into myself. So, it takes like a trusting process to say, this person is safe. Let me see what they're going to do. It's just that vulnerability.

Willow shared how she is mostly open about her sexual identity but highlights how she makes negotiation and concealment decisions within LGBTQ+ spaces as a result of social stigma. She seemingly points to emotional safety as governing her decision-making process.

> I'm very open about my sexual identity, who I am, for the most part but I still find myself, around other women who are in the community, like I almost diminish myself because I still have that weird, I don’t know, if I start to feel, um, it really comes back to like feeling invalidated by others, then I will diminish myself.

Several participants shared that being “single” influenced their decision to conceal their sexual and affectional identity with their parents. Participants reflected on ceasing concealment

with family members if they secured a long-term relationship. For instance, Jaz shared this in discussing her relationship with her mother.

> I've always just told myself, if I meet a Black woman, and it's a real thing, we're really in love, and been together for a while, y'all gonna have to meet her. I don't want to hide that part of me no more. But I also don't feel like any of the relationships I've had, have been significant enough for me to not only expose myself to my parents, but put them in a situation that could be volatile. But I know that conversation will have to come from me and then I'll be this like the pariah in the community until everyone just eventually gets over it.

Camila reflected on concluding concealment of her queer identity with her father upon getting into a relationship.

> I think it's also been helpful that I have been single the whole time that I've never had to just talk about it. At some point, I feel like I will have a partner and that will lead to a more open and honest dialogue about, well here's this partner and our relationship. Here's my identity and how that connects to that.

Similarly, Tremaine shared this sentiment in discussing his relationship with his mother and sisters.

> I think another scenario is finding the right partner that I'm truly devoted too, and they're devoted to me. We feel a true connection. I've always said, that's when I would take them home to mom. That's when I would take them home to meet my sisters, when I knew that this was a person that I love. This was the person that I wanted to spend the rest of my life with for eternity.

Participants delineated what they think about when deciding to negotiate, conceal, or disclose their stigmatized social identities. Participants described significant and non-significant

relationships impacting their decision-making process. After participants make the decision to negotiate or conceal their devalued social identity, the next theme materialized: *stigma management strategies means adapting.* This theme describes the different techniques participants implement to manage social stigma.

Stigma Management Strategies Means Adapting

Stigma management strategies means adapting, details the behaviors and techniques participants contrive to manage social stigma within varying sociocultural environments. Participants mostly described strategies to negotiate or conceal their sexual and affectional identity, rather than express it. Two subthemes emerged that represent the medium used when enacting stigma management strategies: *conforming and avoidance, and social media processes.*

Conforming and Avoidance. *Conforming and avoidance* includes appearance, and behavior changes participants made to fit dominate group norms. Participants described implementing these strategies in different social contexts. For instance, the majority of participants identifying as men mentioned changing their clothing to appear "masculine" and "straight." Dee expressed changing his appearance in heterosexual spaces to appear masculine. He reflected, "hmm, I did it through the clothes I wore. Um, yeah, it's more so the clothes I wore because people thought you were gay based on what you wore. So not wearing tight clothing and stuff." Comparably, Esequiel expressed, "It's usually when I'm in straight spaces. So, if I'm in these spaces, I'll wear bigger clothes. I don't wear as much of my furry things sometimes and change the way I sit." Miguel mentioned changing the way he dressed when going to heterosexual beaches. He shared,

> If I go to the beach, and it's a gay beach, I wear a speedo. But when I go to like Venice or Santa Monica, there's still like a little bit of hesitation of being my full self with how I express myself. Even with speedos versus like shorts.

Three participants spoke to the intersections of race, gender, and sexual orientation, influencing the behavior changes they implemented to conform. Tremaine reflected on the intersections of being a Black gay man, as he discussed altering his appearance as a high school teacher working in a small town.

> I think working in a small town and having the successes that I have been able to have since I've been in this situation. I think it was rooted in the image of people saying, oh okay, he's just a normal, straight Black guy, you know…I will cuff my jeans, let me wear a button down. Let me wear a polo. Oh, I like to play basketball. Oh, okay he's sports oriented. All right check. That's like a point for team straight right there. Oh, he has nice shoes on. Great. So trying to conceal in any of those ways.

Similarly, Camila spoke to the intersections of being a multiracial queer woman in college using behavioral strategies to conform to white heterosexual male norms. She described changing the way she spoke.

> When I entered college, even at the very beginning of grad school, feeling like I had to overcompensate. So being very professional or what I perceived to be professional. Being very cognitive, so I have to show I know these big words and that I know these concepts. So I don't seem like an imposter, which both plays into, my gender identity as well as my sexual identity and my racial-ethnic identity. So, all these kind of coming together. I deserve to be here, so I need to show you why.

Esequiel reflected on the intersections of being a trans person of color, and how he avoids dialogue about his trans identity in LGBTQ+ spaces.

> When I'm in queer or LGBTQ+ spaces I don't want to talk to people about my gender because there's a way in which I can't separate my gender from my racial identity. And also, I don't always want to invite anyone to deconstruct my gender. So sometimes I'm like, let me just not talk to people about who I am.

Mikail described modifying his speech, association, and mannerism with his mother to appear "more straight."

> So, whenever I'm at home, like I'm at home right now. I have to put on like a second face, I talk in a deeper octave. I usually don't speak English at all at home. I speak Arabic because I discovered when I speak Arabic, I sound more straight. I'm more masculine. So, I do that to throw my mom off…I tone it down on the colloquial expressions or the hand movements, that kind of stuff… I make up guy friends here and so she doesn't get suspicious

Additionally, participants described avoidant and silencing behaviors to manage social stigma. Kelvin expressed, "I'll mask at times when it comes to like talking about relationships and like just general conversation with people." Willow explained how she avoided conversations related to her bisexuality in LGBTQ+ spaces to deal with social stigma. She expressed, "so it's almost like I just stopped having conversations around it and avoided the topic of sexuality unless I was with a very specific friend group." Jaz explained how she concealed her bisexual identity by limiting the number of times she visits family members. She shared, "I also don't go home a lot, like I visit maybe once a year." Tremaine spoke of avoidant behaviors related to holding hands with a significant other and conversations at work.

> I try to never be seen in the daylight if I'm talking to someone. I'm not in Walmart with them holding hands, essentially in town…. especially professionally, the easiest way is to not dive into those conversations…I never talk about my personal life at work because then I feel like it dives into questions like, who you going with? Where are you going and what are you doing here?

Emily shared that she is out to her family members as bisexual, but she still negotiates her identity. She expressed, "If I'm with my mom and I see someone that is cute, that's not a man in any way, I'm not going to bring that up. That's just something that's not going to happen." Emily also describes not mentioning or talking about her girlfriend to family members.

> I do live next door to my grandparents and stuff, so I do get to talk to them. And whenever I do talk to my family or my grandparents, or anybody, like, I won't mention my girlfriend until they do to make them comfortable…it just kind of feels like I don't want to make them uncomfortable with any topics or they're not ready to talk about yet.

Esequiel described the difficulties in concealing his trans identity when using the restroom in heterosexual spaces. Esequiel appears to use avoidant behaviors to conceal this social identity.

> And for a long time, I was like, people are going to think it's weird…so, it's interesting cause it's a different kind of thing, but it's concealing. When I have to go to the restroom, I'm like fuck, I need to make sure that no one else has a restroom because I need to use a stall. If someone ask me a question about using a stall, I would look at him like, "what the fuck, why do you care?...why are you being weird right now? Did I ask you about your life?

In sum, participants implemented a variety of *conforming and avoidance* strategies. These strategies helped participants deal with social stigma in various sociocultural contexts. Participants

expressed enacting stigma management strategies through *social media processes*, which is the next subtheme. This subtheme is described and contextualized in the next section.

Social Media Processes. *Social media processes* specify the negotiation and concealment strategies participants implemented via social media. For example, Tremaine spoke of not showing his face on gay dating apps to hide his identity. He reflected, "any app that I'm on, no face, just trying to stay very low-key profile." Some participants described having a private and public social media account to conceal their sexual and affectional social identity. Mikail shared having a private and public social media account. He expressed concealing by posting significant others as best friends on his public social media accounts.

> I don't put that I'm gay on social media, at all. I wouldn't at least on my public Instagram. I would never say I'm gay. I would never post if I had a significant other. If I did post them, I would guise it under like best friends. I would never do that on my private Instagram or Snapchat. I wouldn't mind because again I control the people on there.

Similarly, Tremaine shared,

> There's a social media page for this, there's a social media page for that. I have a page that I consider to be my personal Instagram page, where I follow a lot of my close friends on that one. I can follow people who are like me. Then I have my professional, Instagram page for anybody from work who wants to follow it. It's open to my students…I keep them very separate. I also have two twitters. I have a professional Twitter and a not so professional Twitter…it's a lot of passwords to keep up with, not really. I've got this life password. If I ever die, there goes all of the concealment (laughs)

Jaz reflected on posting a woman she was dating, and never mentioning the status of their relationship.

> When I did date women, she was posted on my stories and stuff like that, nobody really questioned it. But nobody knew. People thought it was just like friends and I wasn't posting like any kind of risky pictures either.

Kelvin described wanting to post guys he is dating on his social media account but never does due to social stigma. He implicitly mentions the intersectional conflict between his sexual orientation and Christian identity.

> That's where the lines with posting me and a guy picture on my own Instagram and Facebook, draw. There are sometimes I want to be like, look at me and bae, knowing it ain't my bae. I just want to see what these people gonna say. But I know because of my walk, the community I help build, and I am building, kinda want you to separate it. Just for the sake of people perceptions and backlash.

Overall, participants implemented stigma management strategies to manage and adapt to stigmatizing environments. Participants utilized these strategies with family, friends, co-workers, and other social interactions. They enacted these strategies in ethnic-racial and LGBTQ+ spaces. As participants implement these strategies, there are multiple influences that determine how they make sense of themselves, others, and what they believe. Thus, the next theme, *affirming contextual influences*, explicates these elements.

Affirming Contextual Influences

Affirming contextual influences describe the factors impacting participants progression towards developing internally driven meaning as they negotiate and conceal their identities within stigmatizing sociocultural contexts. Participants affirming contextual influences embolden them with a felt sense of power and space to challenge broader stigmatizing stereotypes, messages, and

beliefs. Two subthemes captured the different affirming contextual influences: *Internal: Embodied Community and Cultural Power Source* and *External: Micro & Macro Spectrum of Supportive Spaces.*

Internal: Embodied community and cultural power source. *Internal: Embodied community and cultural power* source details participants community and inherited values that provide strength, resiliency, and pride. These cultural strengths appear to act as an unlimited supply of protection against the negative effects of living in stigmatizing sociocultural environments. It provides a pathway for developing personal meaning where participants rely on their inner voices versus oppressive contexts to make sense of their overall existence. This internal power source is embedded on the outside of the meaning-making filter.

Participants frequently shared family stories and collective cultural values that has shaped their positioning and understanding in the world. For example, Jaz reflected on transgenerational resiliency that she is reimaging for herself.

> I think culturally, my mom has made me very aware of the resilience it takes to make it through hardships, especially, knowing my mom grew up in the fifties, seeing a lot of racial discrimination, and in Mississippi there's still segregated schools in 2021. I feel the resiliency in my bones. I know my ancestors had to have been strong to successfully have made it through a lot for us to be here. And I'm grateful for that. However, I feel like that type of resiliency was needed at that time. And now I have a little bit more freedom to redefine that resiliency in my way.

Jaz also reflected on how having collective strength as a result of her ancestor's sacrifices.

> It just feels like all of the things that they did and sacrificed were aligning with all the things that I have gone through. All the toughness and the traumas of the grief they

> experience, but it has made us all stronger. And I feel like I have that collective strength of all the women who went through what they had to for me to get to where I am now. It feels like a big responsibility. But how dare I not choose? Like how dare I not build my life from scratch, however I want to, because I could really be the first generation, in both maternal and paternal female lineages that has this opportunity.

Similarly, Camila spoke of her family's resiliency stories and it empowers them to keep moving forward.

> I think too, aspects of resiliency. Hearing things that both sides of the family went through, like, my mom's side, there was movement back and forth between Puerto Rico and New York based off of availability of jobs and resources, but they were going to do whatever was necessary for the family, on both sides of my family. And they're very large families, too. So, there's a lot of, like, we really need to do whatever we can to provide. So, this resiliency and continuing to move forward and kind of charge forward and we can ensure that we do everything possible to support.

In another example, Esequiel shared how he "come from a people who can find joy and are resilient." He continued and discussed how he has embodied knowledge from his Mexican and Indigenous ancestors that protects him from others.

> It's like, I have a crew behind me. I have a crew with me at all times. I have knowledge, you know what I mean? I have blood that tells me knowledge. I have history of people I've never met that are not related by blood that have paved the way for me, and that's kind of fucking bad-ass. I see culturally, I see my spirituality, as like, the knowledge that's going through my blood. That's my ancestor's knowledge. When I stopped believing that that's real, when I stopped believing in that, I lose my protection. So, there's almost a way, like,

you need to believe it. If you don't believe it, it's not going to protect you. Culturally like that's like a lot of protection. I feel like that protects you when all of the other stuff doesn't.

Willow described the importance of "fostering relationships with everybody in the community, not just family." Furthermore, Emily added, "I feel like, with me personally, with my connection with the fact that I am Mexican, that I am Latina, it's more of like a connection with the community." She continued to explain how this unity assisted her family members in overcoming struggles.

> Values are really important in my family and something that's been passed down over five generations. I would say unity with our family is a very big one. Just having everybody be together. It doesn't matter how many struggles we go through. My grandpa says, if we're all together, that's one less thing we have to worry about.

Tremaine discussed feeling empowered after the fatal shooting of George Floyd and witnessing other racial injustices against Black individuals during our first interview. These injustices seemed to embolden the participant to engage in activism to dismantle White supremacy.

> I think this past summer opened my eyes a lot to being Black. This past summer opened my eyes up to how delicate it is to be Black in America, and to be proud of being Black in America and taking ownership for defeating the white supremacy that has been created in society and doing my part.

In our second interview, he reiterated the significance of the racial injustices, and how it invigorated a sense of pride with him.

> Because of a lot of the injustices that took place this summer, I think that was huge in being proud to be Black and being outspoken about being Black. So many people say I don't see color and things like that, but it's like, no, I'm Black, see this color (laughs). I'm proud to

be Black, and just that empowerment that you saw from that uniting force of African-Americans of we've had enough.

In sum, participants described the importance of collectivism and their cultural values in stimulating a source of strength, empowerment, and resiliency. These felt cultural values appear to serve as a protection barrier against stigmatizing environments, and influence the development of the next theme, a *fluid self-determined meaning-making structure*. Nonetheless, participants stories elucidated the subtheme of *External: Micro & Macro Spectrum of Support*, which further influenced the maturation to a fluid self-determined meaning-making filter.

External: Micro & Macro Spectrum of Supportive Spaces. *External: Micro & Macro Spectrum of Supportive Spaces* represents varying levels of affirming spaces that promoted self-exploration, education, and agency. Participants described interpersonal relationships (micro level) and college (macro level) as supportive contexts. These supportive contexts enabled participants to question the roles, norms, and beliefs they had been socialized into by differing sociocultural environments. Participants encountered these supportive spaces as they negotiated and concealed their social identities in unsupportive environment. Willow reflected on this in describing a friend who helped her reframe her thoughts.

> You know, she helps me reframe the thoughts or messages or things that I hear. So that helps a lot, like that personal relationship that we have, because a lot of times I can't just do it on my own.

Participants reflected on other interpersonal relationships, like the therapeutic relationship, that provided space for them to feel affirmed and make sense of their reality amongst a host of socially enforced categories. For example, Jaz stated, “finding a Black queer therapist who I've been going to for three years, and I just feel like she just gets it.” Mikail also discussed how he

was able to make sense of what family means. He states, “I sought therapy for the first time, which was really amazing. I discovered that family isn't just by blood it's by the friends you make.” Emily further shared the importance of therapy in helping her to work through the stigmatizing messaging she had been socialized into believing during her upbringing.

> I've been going to therapy since the beginning of quarantine and just working on myself and validating each of my identities. But growing up, I think that it's just because like being gay or being whatever, has never played a role in my upbringing. Like it was never celebrated in any way, it was never acknowledged. I always put friendship first before myself and now again with therapy and also processing all of these events that have happened. I've realized that we all have to put ourselves first and especially with myself…giving myself that space because I deserve that.

Some of the participants discussed the importance of an affirming college context and/or on-campus ethnic racial communities in feeling validated and supported. For example, Camila shared,

> I came directly from Orlando, which is one of the most affirming LGBTQ plus spaces. It's quite ethically and racially diverse. Going to UCF, which is also quite an area of diversity, we have 60 plus thousand students. So, it's like you can literally meet anybody, and find spaces to which you can have people that are supportive and engage in dialogue.

Tremaine reflected on his college experiences. He noted the differences between his hometown and college context, which provided more freedom to explore his identities.

> I think it was truly my freshman year in college where you get a little bit of freedom away from some of the stipulations, and you start to be able to explore what you never had access

to because you're not just talking to the small-town people that you grew up with. You're now talking to a multitude of people that have lived experiences.

Miguel shared how college was encouraging space to question and unlearn socialized hegemonic beliefs and norms.

> It didn't take until I was in my 20s and then being in college and really understanding social justice identity and being in those spaces that I was able to move away from those ways of being socialized as a child and then my teens.

Miguel continued, and specifically shared the significance of joining a Latinx honors society in college and how it instilled him with pride.

> I think it's made me a more confident person as well, because if I hadn't unpacked all of the negative ways in which I was raised, I wouldn't have been able to also seek opportunities to be in community with people who can teach me what it's like to be someone with pride within like the Latin X community. For example, I joined an honor society, and it was like a Latin X honor society in college, and so that really helped me with having pride within myself. I was able to have queer friends as well. So, that also helped me understand the different experiences of queer people.

Comparably, Jaz spoke of her experiences attending an "all-girl" historically black college (HBCU).

> I think college, specifically going to an all-girls female historically Black college, was very significant in me unlearning a lot of behaviors and ideals that were just predominantly white and patriarchal. This was the first time I remember being reaffirmed in my wholeness. It allowed me to question what narratives had been placed on me. I ask myself, "do I actually align with this?" or "where did this narrative come from? It didn't come from

me. So, what do I actually want?" And I was able to get that from my HBCU. And I wouldn't have known that had I not been exposed to the opportunities and students and faculty at Spelman. And then, continue to question everything, even after my experience there and now. I think had I not gone to Spelman, I wouldn't have seen the value in all of the identities and diversity within Blackness. And I had a better view of what it really means to be Black. I changed my perspective of what it means to be "respectable." I grew up thinking, you can't be too ratchet or whatever else. But at Spelman it's like, you can do everything. You can be ratchet, you can twerk, you could stay out all night and still get straight A's and that's what matters. And so it really taught me how to be aware of my intersectionality. That's where I learned the term intersectionality.

Through the presented narratives, *affirming contextual influences* equipped participants with safe spaces and a felt sense of cultural strength to challenge and question oppressive meta-narratives while they negotiated and concealed their devalued social identities. This also highlights how participants resisted subjugation through finding agentic spaces within stigmatizing environments. *Affirming contextual influences* helped participants see themselves as independent of the stigmatizing sociocultural environments they encountered, setting the foundation for theme: *Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter.*

Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter

Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter refers to an internally driven structure, which participants use to filter external contexts to make sense of themselves, others, and their beliefs. Participants seemed to subconsciously or consciously rely on their freedom to choose to make sense of their overall existence as they negotiated and concealed their stigmatized social

identities. Additionally, participants self-determined meaning-making filter is fluid and developmental because external contexts still impact how they make sense of their existence. It seems participants developed this filter over time as they encountered external contexts. However, participants take an active role in deciding which contextual influences they use to make sense of their reality. Therefore, *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter* is the processing center participants utilize before they have developed a guided principle or belief about themselves and others.

Some participants implicitly describe the fluidity and developmental feature of the self-determined meaning-making filter. For example, Esequiel reflected on how he used to rely on stigmatizing contexts to make sense his beliefs. He stated, "but for me, I never believed that. I mean, I did for a little while, but then after I stopped believing that." Tremaine shared the developmental aspects of this filter in his story about the homophobic religious teachings he encountered growing up. He implicitly noted how this experience passes through this self-determined meaning-making filter, creating an opportunity to "cancel out" what he's been taught.

> We hold on to those truths and it's like when we have these desires, that it was wrong. So, I think just battling with the reasoning and rationale of what we've been told through religion, and just coming to terms with that…and kind of canceling out some of the ignorance that we were taught before people were a little more accepting.

Similarly, Emily explained how she is "working on" loving and trusting her inner self rather than relying on society's expectations. She expressed,

> I've been working on being okay with being me, like loving who I am and every part of that, and not falling for like society's expectations of who I'm supposed to be. And almost feeling like I'm disappointing someone at some level, just being truly myself.

In general terms, several participants mentioned having the freedom to filter through society's messages to choose what's best for their life. For instance, Jaz mentioned "I take all those lessons and those strengths and those experience from the past people and I use them and I apply them or I un-apply them to what's necessary in my life." Also, Mikail reflected, "I can pick and choose, like, I can write my own narrative about what I like." Willow shared, "I kind of like pick and choose from everything to kind of create my own way that I view and navigate life versus just fully accepting things… kind of cherry pick." She further reflected,

> I try and approach everything like, what can I take from it? And what's going to make me a better person? Um, what's gonna make me a better person that's going to be positive for others, because I don't want to take on attributes that are going to be harmful.

Camila described her *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter* through a metaphor she uses in therapy. In this story, Camila spoke of having the freedom to choose how she makes sense of her experiences. She seemed to recognize the oppressive structures in place that seek to silence discrepant perspectives through internalization. This awareness is what drives her to develop a self-determined meaning-making filter.

> There's this really interesting kind of metaphor that sometimes I use with other folks in therapy and stuff. But it's like, if there is a line and everybody has a red ball. If I throw the red ball at somebody and that's me like being negative or affirming. I'm throwing it at them, but it's still in my space. Like it doesn't actually cross the line. That person has the choice to grab the ball and then internalize that, or take on those feelings. But ultimately, they're my doing so I see it in the same way. Like if someone's throwing this unacceptance at me, it's still in their area. I can choose to go and grab it. But I'm trying to do a lot more to not, because I don't deserve that. I know who I am and I can navigate this world freely

> recognizing the structures that are put in place that don't want me to engage in this navigation. But I think more recently knowing that I now have a choice as to whether I am going to take that on or not.

Kelvin also shared an experience with his mother, and how he holds a dialectical position in understanding his choices.

> So it's like, "you raising a little girl, she don't need to see that type of thing. You know what society viewed that as. You need a heterosexual relationship. You don't need to be talking to these dudes and trying to raise your daughter at the same time." I don't see a problem with it. But she do. Because she's still the core of me. So, I still have that value of her and being who I am too at the same time.

I asked Kelvin to clarify what he means, and he mentioned how he privileges his autonomy and freedom to choose over his parents.

> I'm respecting it because they're my parents. But then again, I'm like what about my autonomy because it's not going to stop or change. It's just going to have to improve. That's just my mind space.

Furthermore, I asked Esequiel about how he understood himself and what he believes within stigmatizing sociocultural environments. He shared how he relies on his inner voice.

> So, I think that it helped me realize that like, even if someone tells me a belief system, "well you shouldn't do this or that." I'm like, do you adhere to this a hundred percent? Do you adhere like to that? And you probably don't. Even if you did that's not my belief system so I don't need to adopt it.

Miguel spoke of being a "critical thinker" and "questioning that you've been taught," which enabled him to focus on his internal voice.

Overall, the *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter* acted as a processing center for making sense of themselves, others, and their beliefs as they negotiated and concealed their devalued social identities. Participants described filters that relied more on their inner self. These filters were self-determined, giving participants the freedom to choose which contextual influences they use to make sense of their existence. The *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter* progressed to the theme of *Meaning-Made within Oppressive Structures to Dismantle Internalized Oppression.*

Meaning-Made within Oppressive Structures to Dismantle Internalized Oppression

Meaning-made within oppressive structures to dismantle internalized oppression emerged after participants discussed how their self-determined meaning-making filter is internally rooted. This filter is the processing hub where participants had the freedom to choose which contextual influences they relied on to make sense of themselves, others, and what they believed. Thus, the meaning-made theme is the end product or outcome of filtering through contextual factors.

The meaning-made theme is a global framework that participants, implicitly or explicitly, used to understand their existence while negotiating and concealing their stigmatized social identities within oppressive structures. This framework appears to aid participants in dismantling internalize oppression as a result of filtering hegemonic stereotypes and messaging to develop an internally driven end product of meaning out of self and others. The meaning-made theme seems to explain how participants can employ stigma management strategies while not seeing themselves as inferior or abnormal, like the messages received from oppressive structures. During their second interview, participants were asked to discuss how their collective social stigma experiences have shaped who they are, what they believe, and how they understand others as they negotiate and

conceal their identities. Two meaning-made subthemes materialized: *The Self is worthy and valuable and humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems.*

The Self is worthy and valuable. In this subtheme, participants described how they understood themselves through a self-acceptance and self-love framework, as they negotiated and concealed their stigmatized identities within oppressive contexts. For instance, Esequiel spoke of having to redefine what beauty is for himself. He shared, "It's helped me re-establish what is beauty because the world has often told me, you are not beautiful, as a collective. You are not worthy." Similarly, Jaz reflected on how experiences of social stigma do not affect her as engages in stigma management strategies because she accepts herself. She stated "I'm just at a place where I care, but it doesn't affect me as much. And I accept myself as I am. And typically, you get on board eventually, so I can give you the time that you need." I asked Jaz to elaborate more on this idea. She then expressed,

> I guess just the experiences that I've been through and the lack of acceptance has made it more important for me to center my self-acceptance and not necessarily put all of my energy towards being accepted by external factors because they're ever changing.

Camila noted how she accepts herself and that oppressive systems are the problem. Like Jaz, and other participants, this framework seems to help her dismantle internalize oppression before it impacts the Self. She shared,

> I think a lot of it is not my problem. I am who I am. And if someone has a problem with me, that is their responsibility…I recognize like, can I curse? Is that a problem here? Like, fuck the system, like I do deserve to be here. I know who I am

Comparably, Dee reflected,

> I learned to accept me where I'm at and that's where I go. And like I said, every day, I learned encouraging words, or learn how to grow as a person mentally. And so that's just where I'm at.

Esequiel told a story to describe his meaning-made framework of self-acceptance and strength. He also discussed the Self as an intersectional being.

> I think to go back to like examples of plants or nature. I guess you can see my soul as a seed. And so, I get planted. I didn't get to choose. I did not choose this. I was a seed that got put in soil somewhere. I think the sun impacted how I grew and the water impacted how I grew or how I adapted to not having water. I grew up in the desert and I think that the desert impacted me. And I think this relates to culture where it's like, being brown, being gay, being trans, there's kind of a thing that's related to the desert where it's like, there is no water. There's not a lot of water there. And there's not a lot of things that could survive. It's actually not an easy place to survive. But for me, I learned how to survive. It's like, I survived like that. I'm a Joshua tree. Joshua trees don't need that much. We figure it out. You'd look, you think I'm dead, but I'm alive. So, I think that's part it. I think that it's impacted me, learning how to be resourceful with the water I have. So, learning how to utilize what I have.

Some participants discussed a self-love framework that helps them as they negotiate and conceal their social identities within stigmatizing sociocultural contexts. Kelvin stated, "so having an open-heart man, that's what really drove me to loving people and really loving myself." Moreover, Emily shared how she's developing a self-love framework. This illustrates how meaning-meaning is constantly evolving as participants encounter the world.

> But now it's almost like having respect for myself. I feel like I've gotten like a new meaning for that word, because prioritizing myself or caring about myself is a sense of respecting myself. I've been working on being okay with being me, loving who I am and every part of that, and not falling for society's expectations of who I'm supposed to be. And almost feeling like I'm disappointing someone at some level, just being truly myself. So, I'm just trying to really just love and connect with every part of myself.

The subtheme, *the Self is worthy and valuable*, created a protection barrier for participants to thwart oppressive contexts and dismantle internalized oppression. Participants privileged their interpretation of Self over hegemonic environments as they negotiated and concealed their devalued social identities. Participants stories also captured the subtheme: *humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems.*

Humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems. *Humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems* is a meaning-made framework that participants developed after social stigma experiences with significant and non-significant others. This framework helped participants understand others from a holistic lens of empathy, which contributed to them successfully negotiating and concealing their identities while not internalizing oppression. Participants developed this framework by seeing others as existing within oppressive systems that have socialized them into this way of being. For instance, Camila shared how she's developed empathy and understanding over time for her parents and family members. She implicitly acknowledges the systems that have impacted their experiences. Camila's reflection also highlighted the evolutionary phenomenon in this meaning-made framework.

> 16-year-old me was only looking at it from their perspective, because that's only what I knew at that point. And I was taking what they shared and the messages that they provided,

and from only their point. Um, and so we're really just looking at it from just two points of view without really taking into account everything else that's going on around us. And now 26-year-old me, 10 years later can really try to put things into context and understand it a little bit further. I think for partially my own peace of mind, but also so that I feel I can offer some of that flexibility and adaptability to others in the future, because I know I've maybe shared something and harm somebody, and I would hope that they could try to put that into context. And I may be harmed in the future, so I'm trying to kind of take into account all points of perspective.

Similarly, Miguel spoke to developing greater understanding for others as a result of socialization processes by oppressive systems.

I understand that a lot of people never had friends or like never had someone close in their life that explained to them or shared their story… so I think that's why I handle it the way that I did. And I mean now more than ever, I have a better understanding of the world, and socializations…I know that everyone's been raised with like homophobic beliefs, language, thoughts, you know, like that's just sort of like the language that we've been raised with. And so, it's not their fault.

Jaz shared how she accepts people where they are at in the decolonization process.

I'm not the first person in my lineage that has been queer or has dated a women. Knowing the history of different cultures, and how different people are and knowing where we as a people came from before we came to this colonized country I think the colonization has made us think being Queer is unnatural I think there's a lot of decolonization that has to happen. And I think I have started doing that for myself. And now I can understand and

am better able to meet people where they are in that process while also being protective of where I choose to move forward in my life."

Tremaine reflected,

> I think that you take a step back not to be so judgmental…It makes you a little more open to learn people and get to know people because they've been through something…they're a person and it kind of humanizes everyone to know that they've had their own journey and their experience. And sometimes the journey is not great and sometimes they're still in the middle of a journey. That's not great. The way that you interact is part of their journey as well…how you responded to them and just doing your part to make sure that you're not stopping anybody's growth…we all are going through something or all dealing with something.

Lastly, Esequiel described how people are often unaware of what they say but their "heart" is in the right place. This may implicitly point to Esequiel's awareness of how people are socialized by oppressive systems, creating a meaning-made framework of understanding.

> I think there's a difference between people who are not aware of what they're doing and doing it, and it's still not okay. There's still an impact. And people who are just fucking cruel. I have a lot of family members who, if you ask them to give a speech, they would just be so bad at saying shit. They would say things that I know, if I was in queer studies, I would just be like, oh fuck, but their heart is so in the right place…I need to believe in myself, in my bubble. And then also I need to believe in other people's as well. Sometimes I can engage with people that I would typically very much hate, and I have to be like, part of me is like, there might be somewhere where you were human.

In sum, *meaning-made within oppressive structures to dismantle internalized oppression* is the end product after participants have filtered through contextual influences. It is an internally rooted, guiding global perspective that help participants employ stigma management strategies while not seeing themselves as deficit, like the messages received from oppressive structures. As participants encounter oppressive contexts, these frameworks serve as a protection barrier against internalized oppression.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe and discuss the findings that emerged from this investigation. The following major themes materialized from this undertaking: (a) *Pervasive Interactions with Oppressive Systems*, (b) *Situational Decision-Making Process*, (c) *Stigma Management Strategies Means Adapting*, (d) *Affirming Contextual Influences*, (e) *Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter*, (f) *Meaning-Made within Oppressive Systems to Dismantle Internalized Oppression.* The findings provide a glimpse into the richness of these ten participants lived experiences of meaning making as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized identities within various sociocultural environments. Participants experienced social stigma and discrimination and used stigma management strategies to adapt to their external environments. While they employed these strategies, they found affirming spaces and crafted an internally driven meaning-making structure. This structure helped participants develop personal meaning out of themselves and others as they negotiated and concealed their stigmatized social identities, aiding in dismantling internalized oppression. Thus, participants narratives underscored how they are resilient and resist subjugation by oppressive systems. In the corresponding chapter, I discuss

the findings, implications, limitations of this study, and impart recommendation for future research.

Chapter 4: Discussion

In this chapter, I delineate how current findings relate to the research questions guiding this critical narrative investigation. Additionally, I describe how these findings connect to previous research on LGBTQ+ POC experiences of meaning-making and identity negotiation and concealment strategies. Lastly, I discuss implications for counseling practice and counselor education, identify limitations of the study, and present recommendations for future research.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences and meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities within sociocultural contexts. Researchers have asserted that negotiation and concealment strategies are maladaptive coping strategies that lead to adverse mental health outcomes for LGBTQ+ people (Beals et al., 2009; Frost, 2011; Frost et al., 2007; Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007). However, the majority of these investigations were completed with mostly White (Beals et al., 2009; Cole et al., 1996; Frost et al., 2007; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Talley et al., 2011) and male participants (Fields et al., 2014; Schrimshaw et al., 2013; Wilson & Miller, 2002), which is insufficient for understanding the experiences of within-group populations like LGBTQ+ POC. Therefore, there is a significant need to enhance counselors' and counselor educators' understanding of these experiences for LGBTQ+ POC.

More importantly, one study suggests that, while not internalizing oppression, LGBTQ+ POC implement negotiation and concealment practices more than White LGBTQ+ people (Moradi et al., 2010). This study further suggests that LGBTQ+ POC have access to cultural resources and strengths that their White counterparts may lack, preventing internalized homophobia from

materializing (Moradi et al., 2010). Thus, LGBTQ+ POC may use these resources and strengths to understand the self and others through meaning-making. Specifically, meaning-making may provide a mechanism for people to understand themselves, others, and what they believe (Baxter, Magolda & King, 2012). Therefore, meaning-making may act as a buffer for LGBTQ+ POC against the adverse mental health effects of using negotiation and concealment strategies to manage social stigma (Frost, 2011). This postulation is supported by stress appraisal research emphasizing that people engage in meaning-making, which influences how stressors impact their mental health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Still, there is no current research investigating the meaning-making structures and lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who engage in negotiation and concealment strategies to manage social stigma. The present study sought to fill this research gap by investigating the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC.

The current investigation used critical narrative inquiry to study the lived experiences and meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ POC who engage in negotiation and concealment stigma management strategies. I used Intersectionality and Self-authorship theory to situate and understand the emerging data. I recruited ten participants who participated in two semi-structured interviews to generate the data. I thematically analyzed and delineated the findings that materialized from twenty interview transcripts. Lastly, I incorporated peer debriefing, member reflections, a pilot study, a reflective journal, and a bracketing interview to add rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness to this investigation. In this section, I discuss the findings that pertain to the research questions guiding this investigation. These findings are also considered in relation to previous research. This discussion is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?
2. What are the meaning-making structures, and embedded cultural resources of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?

Negotiation and Concealment Experiences

Three major themes emerged from participants experiences of negotiation and concealment: *pervasive interactions with oppressive systems, situational decision-making process,* and *stigma management strategies means adapting.* To begin with, *pervasive interactions with oppressive systems* describe participant experiences with oppressive systems, like racism and heterosexism, perpetuated by varying sociocultural groups. Two subthemes emerged in participant's narratives: *explicit: experiences of socialization and discrimination* and *implicit: intersectional invalidation and dissonance*. *Explicit: experiences of socialization and discrimination* explained direct stigmatizing messages, expectations, unjust treatment, and socialization encounters of participants. *Implicit: intersectional invalidation and dissonance* detailed indirect impacts of oppressive systems, like intersectional invisibility and dissonance. These findings cast a light on how oppressive systems impact the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC and influence negotiation and concealment processes. These findings also suggest gender differences in how participants experience oppressive systems.

More specifically, the subtheme, *explicit: experiences of socialization and discrimination* is somewhat consistent with existing literature that highlights LGBTQ+ POC experiences of oppression and discrimination (Balsam et al., 2011; Fields et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017; Peña-

Talamantes, 2013; Wilson & Miller, 2002). Most of these studies noted and captured their experiences of oppression in specific environments like college settings, ethnic-racial spaces, and white LGBTQ+ spaces. However, present findings captured a wide range of sociocultural environments and circumstances in which participants encountered oppression. For example, this study found family, educational institutions, religious institutions, professional spaces, and media to be perpetrators of oppression that keep these systems intact.

Additionally, most of the previous studies investigating this research area did not incorporate an intersectional framework (Fields et al., 2014; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Sung et al., 2015; Wilson & Miller, 2002), which restricted researchers understanding of how these systems interlock and create power structures (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Ghabrial (2017) did utilize an intersectional framework to situate their investigation. However, the researcher seems to provide a weak intersectional analysis, which focused on describing multiple intersecting identities without unearthing power structures that produce social stratification (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). Intersectional researchers emphasize the importance of explicating findings from weak and strong intersectional analyses to understand multiple intersecting identities and the power structures that impact them (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). Researchers incorporate this analysis to name and dismantle oppressive systems (Dill & Kohlman, 2012). The current findings explicated participants' intersectional experiences and exposed the power structures operating in their lives by naming these structures and focusing on the interconnectedness of these systems.

Through the use of an intersectional framework, *implicit: intersectional invisibility and dissonance* emerged as a subtheme. Previous researchers have theorized (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and studied these findings; they also denote the invisibility and disconnection LGBTQ+ POC experience in ethnic-racial and White LGBTQ+ spaces (Chaney et al., 2011;

Ghabrial, 2017; Sung et al., 2015). Previous research also explicates the dissonance and internal conflict LGBTQ+ people may experience as a result of living in hegemonic contexts (Abes & Jones, 2004; Barton, 2010; Beals et al., 2009; Dahl & Galliher, 2009, 2012; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Fields et al., 2014; Pachankis, 2007; Sarno et al., 2015). Additionally, this finding also expounds how this dissonance and internal may set the foundation for deliberate meaning-making, which researchers have continuously emphasized (Abes & Jones, 2004; Kegan, 1994; Kunnen & Bosma, 2000; Park, 2010). Overall, the major theme, *pervasive interactions with oppressive systems*, provides a more robust understanding of oppressive systems and LGBTQ+ POC experiences within these structures. This finding is one of a few studies to holistically capture this understanding due to incorporating an intersectional framework. This finding generated the next theme, *situational decision-making process*.

The theme *situational decision-making process* captured participants' decisions to negotiate/conceal or disclose their socially devalued identity. Participants described a myriad of situations and circumstances impacting their decision-making process. Participants discussed their decision-making methods within different sociocultural groups, like family, friends, and ethnic-racial and queer spaces. This finding demonstrates two concepts. First, LGBTQ+ POC experience varying degrees of outness as they negotiate and conceal their socially devalued identities. Second, internal and external processes impact the decision-making of LGBTQ+ POC, constructing a contextually and situationally dependent resolution. In general, this finding is consistent with previous research illuminating the decision-making process of LGBTQ+ people (Beals, 2009; Chrobot-Mason & Button, 1999; D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; Ghabrial, 2017; Peña-Talamantes, 2013). More specifically, this finding is synonymous with the study by Orne (2011), which describes the varying decision-making processes of gay men. Similar to this study's conclusion,

Orne found that outness was not a linear process or a goal in every situation for participants. However, the current study found other influences impacting LGBTQ+ POC decision-making process not noted in this study, and others. For example, participants described emotional safety, valuing of certain relationships, and securing a long-term romantic relationship as other influences on their decision-making that were not determined by previous research studies. Participants seemed to engage in these decision-making processes due to oppressive systems producing power relationships. These relationships appeared to relegate participants to subservient positions with the goal of forcing them to change and assimilate to dominant group norms. This dynamic may have instilled a sense of fear, causing participants to engage in this decision-making process. Overall, this finding goes beyond previous studies, highlighting LGBTQ+ POC varying decision-making processes within multiple sociocultural contexts.

After participants decided to negotiate or conceal their stigmatized social identities, the next theme, *stigma management strategies means adapting*, materialized. This theme describes the varying methods participants used to manage social stigma in varying contexts. Most participants described negotiating and concealing their sexual and affectional identity with family members. This finding is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the negotiation and concealment behaviors of LGBTQ+ POC (Fields et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Sung et al., 2015). For example, Sung et al. (2015) described the experiences of Asian American lesbian and bisexual women who negotiate their sexual and affectional identity around kin to maintain family honor and pride.

Furthermore, participants in this study employed different types of stigma management strategies to cope with social stigma, and two subthemes captured these observations: *conforming and avoidance* and *social media processes*. First, *conforming and avoidance* describe the

appearance, and behavioral changes participants applied to assimilate to dominant heterosexual norms. This finding is directly in line with previous LGBTQ+ POC studies denoting these stigma management strategies (Fields et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Sung et al., 2015; Wilson et al., 2002). Also, from these findings, it is clear that there are gender differences related to the types of conforming and avoidance strategies participants implement. For example, in this study, the trans- and cis-gendered male participants incorporated appearance change methods to a greater degree than female participants. This finding appears to be novel when compared to previous studies. Previous studies have noted appearance changes of specific gender groups within the LGBTQ+ POC population (Fields et al., 2014; Sung et al., 2015) and have noted gender differences in the use of other stigma management skills (Chrobot-Mason & Button, 1999). However, none of these studies note differences between genders in regards to appearance changes. A possible explanation for this finding could be that the queer and bi-sexual women participants in this study are more feminine presenting, which is in line with gender binary dominant assumptions about women within the LGBTQ+ community (Blair & Hoskin, 2014).

The next subtheme, *social media processes*, describes participant's negotiation and concealment processes via social media. Specifically, participants described having private and public social media accounts and posting their significant others as "friends" on their public accounts. While this finding is novel in LGBTQ+ POC research, previous researchers have generally discussed this negotiation or concealment process for White LGBTQ+ people (Duguay, 2016; Hanckel et al., 2019; McConnell et al., 2017; Talbot et al., 2020; Vivienne & Burgess, 2012). For instance, Talbot et al. (2020) described the various social media stigma management strategies used by LGBTQ+ university students, like having multiple social media accounts and not liking LGBQ+ related content. However, previous findings do not acknowledge how LGBTQ+ people

will post significant others as friends on their public social media accounts, as this study uniquely does. Thus, this particular finding revealed how participants constructed strategies to build agentic spaces while negotiating and concealing their social identities within stigmatizing online spaces.

The overall findings addressing this research question emphasized how participants' experiences were permeated by hegemonic power structures. These power structures seek to force change, instill fear, and silence discrepant viewpoints over multiple points in their lives (Jordan, 2017). It is important to note that participants parents, family members, friends, and social institutions formed these power relationships and structures. These structures caused participants to continuously develop stigma management strategies within stigmatizing sociocultural environments to avoid marginalization. For example, stigma management strategies related to conforming and avoiding, and social media, helped participants fit prototypical dominant group norms. Additionally, their lived experiences of negotiation and concealment appear to be both contradictory and a form of submission to oppressive systems. However, findings illustrate how this is a ruse, as participants still constructed agentic spaces as they negotiated and concealed their social identities within stigmatizing environments. Nonetheless, the findings elucidate how LGBTQ+ POC experiences of negotiation and concealment are contextual and based on internal and external factors.

Meaning-Making Structures and Cultural Resources

Three major themes emerged from participants experiences of meaning-making: *affirming contextual influences, fluid self-determined meaning-making filter,* and *meaning-made within oppressive systems to dismantle internalized oppression*. First, *affirming contextual influences* is an essential finding to understanding the factors leading to participants' progression towards a

fluid self-determined meaning-making filter. From this finding, it is clear that these influences provided a space for participants to feel supported, validated, and empowered. Through this finding, two subthemes emanated*: internal: embodied community & cultural power source* and *external: micro & macro spectrum of supportive spaces.* Together, these subthemes appear to influence participant's meaning-making filter, which is consistent with meaning-making theory and research (Park, 2010).

Internal: Embodied community & cultural power source described participants internally felt, ethnic-racial cultural factors that provided an unlimited supply of strength and resiliency. These factors are based on a collectivist orientation and valuing, which researchers assert as more critical for people of color than other racial groups (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Moradi et al., 2010). More specifically, this finding highlights how these influences act as a protective factor against the adverse effects of living within oppressive contexts. This finding is similar to previous research findings underscoring ethnic-racial cultural characteristics as a source of strength for LGBTQ+ POC (Kuper et al., 2014; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Sung et al., 2015). These studies found that ethnic-racial cultural factors provided a source of strength, empowerment, resiliency, and pride for LGBTQ+ POC. For example, Peña-Talamantes's (2013) findings described the collectivist ethnic-racial cultural factors of lesbian and gay Latinx college students as they negotiated their stigmatized social identities at home and college. However, like previous studies, Peña-Talamantes et al.'s investigation failed to demonstrate how these ethnic-racial cultural factors helped participants develop a meaning-making filter for interpreting their lived experiences. Therefore, this finding builds upon previous LGBTQ+ POC research, revealing the function and process of ethnic-racial cultural factors within meaning-making as participants negotiate and conceal their devalued social identities.

The subtheme *External: Micro & macro spectrum of supportive spaces* delineated interpersonal relationships (micro) and college as affirming contexts for participants in this study. This finding emphasized how these contexts positively influenced the development of participant's meaning-making filters. These supportive networks are similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1979/1994) ecological systems theory that posits the impact of different environmental systems on people's overall development and lives. At the micro-level, most participants discussed their interpersonal relationship with a therapist as an affirming environment that helped them question and make sense of stigmatizing messages. This finding is similar to previous theories and research findings that point to the supportive role of therapy and how it aids marginalized individuals in making sense of oppressive experiences (Bellin, 2017; Semmler & Williams, 2000). For instance, Bellin (2017) found that humanistic therapy helped marginalized clients by providing a sense of autonomy and validation, safety for expressing a range of emotions, and contextualizing their experiences to create meaning in life. In particular, some participants in the current study described the importance of having an LGBTQ+ POC therapist to make sense of their experiences. Previous research has found that individuals prefer a therapist that matches their ethnic-racial identity (Cabral & Smith, 2011). However, no research validates client and therapist ethnic-racial matching as improving client outcomes (Cabral & Smith, 2011).

At the macro level, most participants described college as an affirming and supportive space. Specifically, some participants mentioned the significance of queer and non-queer ethnic-racial spaces in building pride and questioning oppressive meta-narratives. This finding is similar to previous research findings on how LGBTQ+ POC may connect with queer (Hill-Silcott, 2015; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011) and non-queer (Means & Jaeger, 2013; Patton, 2011) ethnic-racial spaces in college for support. However, LGBTQ+ POC simultaneously experienced homophobia and

heterosexism, leading to feeling isolated in non-queer ethnic-racial spaces (Means & Jaeger, 2013; Patton, 2011). This contradictory experience may be due to LGBTQ+ POC still placing a high importance on forming a connection to their ethnic-racial identity (Ghabrial, 2017). Nonetheless, heterosexism seems to determine and explain the varying experiences of LGBTQ+ POC within non-queer ethnic-racial spaces. As a whole, *affirming contextual influences* finding demonstrated how these supportive spaces enabled participants to question dominant narratives, beliefs, and expectations to develop a *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter.*

Through the use of self-authorship theory as an interpretive lens, the next theme emerged: *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter*. The *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter* is an inner-driven meaning-making structure that helped participants filter external contexts to make sense of themselves, others, and their beliefs. Notably, this finding illustrates how participants are active agents in deciding which contextual influences they use to make meaning out of their existence in relation to others. Participants' internally driven meaning-making filter highlighted their freedom to choose how they filtered through society's messages. While this finding is notable in research with LGBTQ+ POC participants, previous meaning-making studies have demonstrated how participants developed an internally driven meaning-making structure that helped them decide which contexts defined their understandings of self and others (Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Baxter Magolda, 2008). It is important to note that these studies specifically focused on meaning-making concerning lesbian identity development and college student development, whereas this study focused on meaning-making within oppressive contexts as LGBTQ+ POC negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities. This finding is also influenced by ethnic-racial cultural factors, which is not noted in previous research studies.

Furthermore, the present finding confirms the developmental and fluid nature of participants' meaning-making filters. While most participants described relying more on their internal voice, some participants did explain how they were progressing towards this filter. This finding explicates the fluidity of participants' filters. Differences in fluidity and progression may be due to participant's cognitive complexity. For example, most participants in this study were highly educated, meaning they may have increased cognitive abilities that aided in developing an internally driven meaning-making filter. Previous research studies have noted how increased cognitive complexity influenced the development of an internally driven meaning-making structure (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Pizzolato, 2003). Overall, the fluid self-determined meaning-making filter finding helped participants progress towards creating global meaning out of themselves and others as they negotiate and conceal their devalued social identities within sociocultural environments.

The global meaning participants made out of themselves and others was captured by the theme *meaning-made within oppressive systems to dismantle internalized oppression*. This finding illuminates the end product after participants have filtered external contexts, like stigmatizing messages about their social identities. It also includes filtering affirming influences, like the ethnic-racial cultural strengths previously discussed. Within this major theme, two subthemes emerged: *the Self is worthy and valuable,* and *humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems. The Self is worthy and valuable* describes participants' global framework for understanding themselves as they negotiate and conceal their socially devalued identities. Most participants described a guiding global framework of self-acceptance and self-love to understand themselves within stigmatizing sociocultural environments while engaging in stigma management strategies. This finding is similar to previous research findings pointing to LGBTQ+ POC trusting their inner

voices and thoughts about Self over dominant socially stigmatizing messages (Ghabrial, 2017; Meyer et al., 2011; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Sung et al., 2015). For example, Ghabrial (2017) discussed this critical finding in their study, describing positive intersectionality as participants' inner-focused interpretive lenses for describing positive components of their stigmatized social identities.

Furthermore, the subtheme *humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems* explicates participants' global framework for understanding significant and non-significant others after experiences of social stigma. Specifically, most participants described understanding family members, ethnic-racial communities, and others within colonized oppressive systems. This framework increased participant empathy and understanding for others who perpetuate and maintain the functioning of oppressive systems. Previous research findings have emphasized how LGBTQ+ POC developed increased empathy and understanding for others (Sung et al., 2015). Still, the meaning-making component or progression towards developing this framework is novel to existing LGBTQ+ POC research. Also, similar studies generally discuss how participants empathize with others while failing to identify the specific groups for which this meaning was developed and how it applies to oppressive systems. Overall, these findings are significant because they support previous research on how LGBTQ+ POC use their global meaning frameworks with embedded cultural strengths to buffer the deleterious effects of internalized oppression. Researchers have posited that meaning-making (Frost, 2011) and culture strengths may buffer LGBTQ+ POC against internalized oppression (Meyer, 2010; Moradi et al., 2010) as they negotiate or conceal their socially denigrated identities. However, no empirical evidence exists that explains the link between meaning-making and cultural factors in buffering LGBTQ+ POC

against this adverse effect. Overall, this finding is novel and increases our understanding of this phenomenon for LGBTQ+ POC.

In summary, participants' narratives represent risk and resiliency perspectives underscored in existing research (Barnett et al., 2019; Ghabrial, 2017; Meyer, 2003; Meyer, 2010; Mordai et al., 2010; Sung et al., 2015). Participants reported widespread encounters with oppressive systems like racism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, and xenophobia. Yet, participants developed internally driven global meaning frameworks to understand themselves and others as they negotiated stigmatizing sociocultural environments. These frameworks acted as a buffer against internalized oppression, helping participants see themselves and others based on their internally driven perspective. This study contributes to existing research in several ways: (1) it identified a meaning-making and negotiation and concealment process within stigmatizing sociocultural environments; (2) provided an explanation of how ethnic-racial cultural factors impact meaning-making structures; and (3) demonstrated how meaning-making provides a pathway for thwarting internalized oppression. It is important when considering these findings that limitations of the research study are also outlined.

Limitations of the Study

Although I implemented widely accepted methods to ensure rigor and trustworthiness throughout this critical narrative investigation, there are some potential limitations. One limitation of the present study naturally relates to the researcher's subjectivity influencing the entire investigation. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument and as is also the individual collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2017). Also, the interview process was co-constructed due to the methodological approach implemented. For example, critical narrative

inquiry is a methodological approach situated in critical theory (Barone, 1992) and the transactional nature of reality (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). These situated philosophical assumptions guided the research decisions I made throughout this study. Thus, I was inextricably tied to this investigation and did not seek to remove my subjectivity from it. As a result, I ensured credibility was promoted by being transparent and implementing the following procedures: a pilot study, bracketing interview, peer debriefer, research journal, and member reflections.

Other limitations may relate to the sampling method and sample size. I used purposeful and snowball sampling methods to acquire participants who could best address the research questions of this investigation. From these methods, I attained a sample of ten participants. While existing research supports the use of purposeful and snowball sampling (Abes & Jones, 2004; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Pena-Talamantes, 2013) and the sample size attained (Andrews et al., 2008), my findings are limited in scope and participants could have potentially responded in socially desirable ways. Some researchers do explain how qualitative research can emotionally move readers to make naturalistic generalizations about qualitative researchers (Tracy, 2010), promoting empathic validity (Dadds, 2008). Nevertheless, the contextually laden nature of these findings is consistent with the overarching aim of this study. I limited inclusion to understand the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who engage in negotiation and concealment strategies. It is worth mentioning that most participants had a master's degree, which was not inclusionary criteria. This discovery may have further impacted the findings of this study due to participant's level of cognitive complexity. It is worth nothing that majority of participants born and raised in the South, thus a potential limitation exists as it relates to regional and cultural experiences.

Furthermore, in this investigation, I created a collaborative relationship to dismantle the inherent power imbalances within the research relationship. To create this relational dynamic, I

implemented member reflections, journaled about my research decisions, and checked in with participants regarding our interactions during each interview. I did this as a safeguard to receiving socially desirable responses from participants.

Lastly, most qualitative studies incorporating self-authorship to understand meaning-making use a longitudinal design (Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxster Magolda, 2001; Baxster Magolda, 2008; Torres and Hernandez, 2007). The use of longitudinal designs aid researchers in understanding an individual's progression and development of meaning-making (Abes & Jones, 2004), which was limitedly captured in the current study. This developmental aspect is imperative to understanding the intricacies of meaning-making. Therefore, the design implemented in this study may have produced a parse-down understanding of participants' meaning-making over time.

Implications

In this section, I discuss the implications for counseling practice and counselor education. Additionally, I provide recommendations for future research to build upon current findings. The implications presented are not exhaustive and represent the most important conclusions drawn from this investigation. I also situate most of my implications in intersectionality, which requires studies to demonstrate a social justice orientation (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

Counseling Practice & Counselor Education

Throughout this investigation, participants' narratives continuously emphasized the impact of interlocking forms of oppressive systems on their mental health and overall wellbeing. This finding clearly illuminates the need for counselors to orient to a multicultural and social justice praxis to address the layered concerns of LGBTQ+ POC. Counselors deficient in this praxis may

be operating from a White-Eurocentric focus, which can lead to perpetuating oppressive systems and causing unintentional harm to LGBTQ+ POC (Crethar et al., 2008). Therefore, counselors need to continuously engage in critical reflexivity, embody cultural humility, and seek continuing education to orient themselves to understand and address the plight of LGBTQ+ POC. As a starting point, the cycle of socialization is a theoretical model that could assist novice counselors in their anti-oppressive practices to actualize multicultural and social justice competencies, critical reflexivity, and cultural humility. This theoretical model could assist counselors with examining their worldviews, maintaining an other-centered orientation, and have an openness to learning from clients about their cultural ways of knowing and existing in the world.

More specifically, the finding above emphasizes the need for counselors to incorporate the ACA Advocacy Model in their practice to address the negative impact of oppressive systems on the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ POC. This model aids counselors in developing interventions with and on behalf of clients at the individual, community, and public level (Toporek & Daniels, 2018). For example, counselors can assess how LGBTQ+ POC experience oppression and incorporate multicultural and social justice theories like critical race theory into their practice at the individual level. Unlike traditional counseling theories, these approaches were created to dismantle oppressive systems (Singh et al., 2020). Counselors working at the community level could educate others, assess community needs, join local organizations supporting LGBTQ+ POC, donate money, or withdraw support from businesses discriminating against LGBTQ+ POC (Johnson, 2018). They can also sign petitions, lobby against anti-LGBTQ+ laws, or write letters to their legislators at the public level. To address the oppressive systems impacting LGBTQ+ POC, counselors must possess the awareness, knowledge, skills, and actions needed to advocate with and on their behalf at multiple levels.

Participant narratives endorsed both risk and resiliency perspectives emphasized in previous research. For example, participants discussed many situational and contextual factors influencing their decision to negotiate or conceal their devalued social identities. Most participants describe their decision-making process concerning family members. Some of the factors influencing their decision to negotiate or conceal had palpable consequences that could adversely affect their psychological and safety needs. On the other hand, participants demonstrated their ability to embody cultural strengths, find agentic spaces, and engage in deliberate meaning-making to dismantle the harmful effects of negotiating or concealing their social identities. Notably, participants emphasized the significance of the counseling relationship in providing support and helping them question and make personal meaning out of their experiences. Still, most researchers and mainstream media promote coming out as optimal for psychological health and dissuade against concealment and negotiation strategies, as they are shown to adversely impact one's wellbeing (Ghabrial, 2017; Moradi et al., 2010; Orne, 2011). The findings of this study suggest counselors need to avoid this binary perspective. Counselors endorsing this binary perspective may operate from a deficit conceptualization model and erroneously pathologize LGBTQ+ POC implementing these strategies.

To deconstruct this binary thinking, counselors must informally and formally assess for risk and resiliency of LGBTQ+ POC clients and reject generalized understandings. For example, counselors should ask specific questions about experiences of social stigma and discrimination in multiple contexts. These questions should uncover past and current reactions and coping mechanisms. Counselors should also consider support systems like family of origin and family of choice, as they may enhance or impede the client's wellbeing. More importantly, to address findings related to meaning-making, counselors need to implement interventions and strategies

that assist clients in externalizing, deconstructing, and making personal meaning out of themselves, others, and their beliefs as they encounter oppressive environments. These strategies should include exploring the role of ethnic-racial cultural resources in influencing client's meaning-making structures. Overall, the suggested meaning-making strategies and an affirming counseling relationship could aid LGBTQ+ POC clients in developing self-knowledge and self-acceptance, as participant narratives in this study demonstrated.

Although the findings of this study are most relevant to counseling practice, they are also pertinent to counselor education training programs. In particular, the findings highlight the need for multicultural and social justice counselors to address oppressive systems impacting participants' wellbeing. Counselors are initially trained by counseling programs. Researchers suggest how may perpetuate hegemonic systems of oppression in the learning environment (Goodman et al., 2015; Haskins & Singh, 2015). This dynamic may occur when counselor educators fail to incorporate culturally relevant pedagogical methods (Haskins & Singh, 2015), preventing students from developing the multicultural and social justice dispositions needed to work with culturally diverse individuals (Goodman et al., 2015). For example, Goodman et al. (2015) explained how counselors in training might develop political neutrality and voyeurism positions, failing to engage with and on behalf of clients politically. Therefore, counselor educators need to evaluate their curriculums to assess hegemonic pedagogical practices. Haskins & Singh's (2015) Critical Race Theory Checklist can be helpful in facilitating this assessment, leading to improvements in teaching and supervising counselors in training.

Furthermore, the findings of this study clarify the need for counselor educators to contextualize the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC. Participant narratives demonstrated the situational nature of negotiation and concealment processes and the need to understand how these

aspects impact their overall wellbeing. Therefore, to contextualize LGBTQ+ POC experiences of negotiation and concealment, counselor educators need to include culturally relevant case conceptualizations, case studies, media like role-playing interviews, and films in their teaching and supervision sessions (Day-Vines et al., 2018). Alternative instructional strategies like reflexive writing assignments (Cheshire, 2013), community-based activism activities, and immersion experiences (Enns et al., 2004) are additional methods counselor educators can incorporate.

Recommendations for Future Research

The present study can inform future studies investigating LGBTQ+ POC experiences of meaning-making and negotiation or concealment strategies in several ways. Future research should consider replicating this investigation by studying within-group LGBTQ+ POC populations separately (i.e. bisexual women of color, trans women of color), as this study revealed unique experiences of oppression for specific groups. Additionally, the current investigation's research design minimally captured the developmental aspects of meaning-making using self-authorship theory. Existing research studying incorporating self-authorship used a longitudinal design, which has shown to aid in understanding the contextual and developmental nature of meaning-making (Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxster Magolda, 2001; Baxster Magolda, 2008; Torres and Hernandez, 2007). Implementing a longitudinal design could also increase understanding of negotiation and concealment processes through time. Therefore, future research can fruitfully explore this topic further by using a longitudinal research design.

The majority of current research investigating the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC emphasize how they are at risk for developing mental health problems due to possessing multiple stigmatized social identities (Barnett et al., 2019). However, the findings of this study

demonstrate both risk and resiliency perspectives, specifically emphasizing how LGBTQ+ POC make internal meaning out of themselves and others as they negotiate or conceal their devalued social identities. As a result of these findings, future research should consider explicating both risk and resiliency perspectives when investigating this research area. Researchers failing to explicate both perspectives could perpetuate social power structures that seek to maintain order through silencing and viewing groups as subordinate. The current investigation was situated in intersectionality, which helped to expose both risk and resiliency perspectives. Also, while the findings primarily uncovered participants' intersectional experiences related to race, sexual orientation, and gender, a few participants described the intersections of other social identities attached that create and maintain a stratified society (i.e. immigrant, ability status). Thus, it would be important for future research to investigate and ask specifically about other stigmatized social identities.

Future research on this topic might extend the explanations of how meaning-making and ethnic-racial cultural strengths aid LGBTQ+ individuals in dismantling internalized oppression in several ways. First, future research could benefit from using a comparative design to understand the differences between LGBTQ+ POC and their White counterparts' meaning-making structures and how it impacts their mental health as they negotiate or conceal their stigmatized identities. This type of investigation could provide increase support for how ethnic-racial cultural factors mediate internalized oppression. Furthermore, a grounded theory investigation could aid in understanding the combined process of negotiation and concealment and meaning-making, which this study set in motion. Overall, the recommendations provided could prove quite beneficial to expanding researchers understanding of this phenomenon.

Conclusion

In this study, I interviewed ten LGBTQ+ persons of color to understand their lived experiences and how they made meaning out of themselves, others, and their beliefs as they negotiated and concealed their devalued social identities. Their stories highlighted experiences with interlocking forms of discrimination and social stigma that seek to silence, subjugate, and force change upon them. Yet, these individuals constructed methods for resisting domination and colonization by finding affirming spaces and embodying collective cultural strength to develop internally driven meaning out of themselves, others, and their beliefs. More importantly, their stories emphasize a quote by Chris Colfer: "There's nothing wrong with you, but there's a lot wrong with the world you live in."

To fully address the well-being of LGBTQ+ POC, the findings demonstrate how counselors and counselor educators must reject apolitical positions because research demonstrates how counseling practice is inextricably tied to public policy and social justice issues (Goodman et al., 2015). Therefore, counselors need to become accomplices and advocates with and on behalf of this population at various levels of engagement to dismantle systemic oppression. In sum, participants' stories emphasized how they are resilient, irreducible, and powerful beings. To this end, I leave you with this quote from one of the participants that others implicitly echoed through their experiences of being-in-the-world: "I'm just living my best life."

Chapter 5: Manuscript

Before queer liberation efforts, science and religious institutions normalized the social stigmatization and discrimination of Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other non-heterosexual (LGBTQ+) people (Alexander et al., 2018; Eaklor, 2008). The psychiatry field was influential in the social stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people by classifying non-heterosexuality as a psychological disorder in DSMs 1-3 (Drescher, 2015). These oppressive tools influence cultural beliefs and legislation aimed at criminalizing non-heterosexuality (Drescher, 2015). As cultural beliefs shifted from pathology to greater acceptance, White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women emerged as the prototypical LGBTQ+ person. Portraying the LGBTQ+ community as White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women erases the lived experiences of within groups, like LGBTQ+ POC. For example, less is known about the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC and how their wellbeing is impacted by stigmatizing sociocultural environments. Boehmer (2002) demonstrated how out of 3,777 articles addressing LGBT public health issues, 85% excluded participants' race/ethnicity. Similarly, Barnett (2019) explained how the majority of psychological research articles on LGBT concerns were published within the last ten years. The dearth of literature on the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC could limit counselors' understanding of how to address their varied and contextually layered concerns.

Current scholarship demonstrates how LGBTQ+ POC regularly experience multiple forms of social stigma and discrimination in varied sociocultural contexts. For example, in a survey study conducted by National Public Radio et al. (2017), 57% of LGBTQ people reported experiencing insults, and 53% reported experiencing derogatory remarks as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Researchers did not present within-group racial differences in this study, which may contribute to silencing of the LGBTQ+ POC community and perpetuate the LGBTQ+

community as a homogenous group. Similarly, in a U.S. Transgender Survey, 61% of Black identifying Transgender people reported experiencing mistreatment and abuse by police officers (James et al., 2016). Furthermore, LGBTQ+ POC are disproportionately targeted by anti-LGBT violence, which may have deleterious effects on their welfare. For example, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2018) found that 71% of anti-LGBTQ violent reported homicides were against POC.

The literature on LGBTQ+ POC experiences of multiple minority stress highlights risk and resiliency perspectives. The risk perspective emphasizes the adverse mental health impact of experiencing multiple forms of stigma (Moradi et al., 2010). The resiliency perspective suggests successful adaption to multiple minority stress (Moradi et al., 2010). The majority of related research has focused primarily on the risk perspective (Barnett et al., 2019), which includes risk associated with concealing or negotiating one's stigmatized identities to avoid multiple minority stress (Meyer, 2003; Moradi et al., 2010). More specifically, research demonstrates how concealing and negotiating one's identity is a maladaptive coping strategy that may lead to more mental and physical health problems (Beals et al., 2009; Frost, 2011; Frost et al., 2007; Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007), which represents the risk perspective. Scholars theorized that concealing a stigmatized identity creates cognitive dissonance from fear of being discovered (Frost, 2011), negatively impacting one's self-worth (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Jackson & Mohr, 2016). However, the majority of this research on LGBTQ+ people has been completed with mostly White (Beals et al., 2009; Cole et al., 1996; Frost et al., 2007; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Talley et al., 2011) and male participants (Fields et al., 2014; Schrimshaw et al., 2013; Wilson & Miller, 2002), making it difficult to generalize these findings to within groups, like POC, women, or people existing at these intersections.

Limited research highlighting the resiliency perspective for LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized social identities exists. In particular, one study asserts that LGB POC are more likely to conceal their sexual orientation than White LGB people; however, perceived heterosexism and internalized homophobia were not remarkable for LGB POC but notable for White LGB individuals (Moradi et al., 2010). These results suggest that LGB POC participants could negotiate and conceal their social identities without experiencing adverse mental health effects, like internalized homophobia. Therefore, this study points to how LGBTQ+ POC may have cultural resources and strengths that White LGBTQ+ individuals may not (Meyer, 2010; Moradi et al., 2010). LGBTQ+ POC may be able to use these cultural resources to redefine the self and others through meaning-making, which provides a pathway for interpreting their experiences of being-in-the-world (Frost, 2011). Meaning-making is a metaphysical process through which people understand themselves, their relationships, and the overall world (Baxter, Magolda & King, 2012; Markman et al., 2013). Stress appraisal research explains how people make meaning of stressors, which determines how it affects their mental health (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, meaning-making may act as a buffer against minority stress for LGBTQ+ POC, which may explain how they are not as susceptible to the adverse effects of concealing and negotiating their social identities to deal with social stigma.

There is no current literature in counseling or counselor education investigating the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their social identities, and how it impacts their wellbeing. Without this information, counselors and their educators are ill-equipped to address the concerns of LGBTQ+ POC (Remly & Herlihy, 2016) because they are employing literature generalizing the LGBTQ+ population as White cisgender Gay men and Lesbian women (DeFilippis, 2016). As a result, counselors fail to consider the

cultural values of LGBTQ+ POC and may inaccurately pathologize their concealment and negotiation behaviors. In turn, counselor educators would provide inaccurate knowledge to counselors in training. Thus, the counseling environment for LGBTQ+ POC could parallel oppressive, hegemonic sociocultural contexts and become an added source of stress for LGBTQ+ POC (Corey et al., 2015). Therefore, the current study seeks to fill this research gap by investigating the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their social identities.

Stigma Management

Identity management of stigmatized individuals is a process for coping with sociocultural environments that denigrate characteristics of one's identity (Frost, 2011). This identity management process can be traced to early literary works by W.E.B. Dubois. Dubois (1982) introduced the term double consciousness to refer to two different and contradictory consciousness states that Black people embodied to deal with White hegemonic, oppressive conditions. Currently, the literature on identity management processes of stigmatized individuals identifies two strategies: concealment and code-switching (Frost, 2011). Concealment of a stigmatized identity refers to a process where individuals with concealable identities, like sexual minorities, hide or camouflage their stigmatized identity to avoid the negative impact of stigma (Quin & Earnshaw, 2013). Code-switching refers to an identity management process of individuals with visible stigmatized identities, like POC, and how they switch between their speech, dress, and behaviors when interacting with their ethnic-racial communities and with White outgroup members (Cross, 2012). These identity management strategies for coping with one's minority status create internal dissonance from the fear of being exposed and discerning when and how to negotiate these

contexts (Frost, 2011). Research states how this internal dissonance and burden create additional stigma-related stress, like internalized oppression (Frost, 2011). Internalized oppression occurs due to the theory that concealing or code-switching behaviors perpetuate a lack of self-worth and reinforces one's minority status (Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Jackson & Mohr, 2016).

Furthermore, previous research and theories highlight the positive mental health benefits of sharing aspects of one's self with others (Beals et al., 2009; Meyer, 2003; Pennebaker, 1995) and consistently posits the negative impact of concealing aspects of one's self (Frost et al., 2007; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Meyer, 2003; Pachankis, 2007). However, these studies included mostly White (Cole et al., 1996; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Meidlinger & Hope, 2014; Talley et al., 2011) and male participants (Schrimshaw et al., 2013), making it insufficient to generalize findings to within groups, like POC, women, or people existing at these intersections. Results as such perpetuate the LGBTQ+ community as being a homogenous group of White people or men.

There is a paucity of literature that highlights how LGBTQ+ POC concealing or hiding their identities are resilient (Ghabrial, 2017; Sung et al., 2015). Ghabrial (2017) described the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC non-disclosure of their sexual orientation and other identities to their parents out of fear of being disowned. To deal with this, participants reported hiding invisible aspects of their identities like sexual orientation, HIV status, mental health issues, and disability status, identities which society tends to stigmatize. While participants experienced added minority stress and concealed their stigmatized identities, some of the participants were resilient despite encountering heterosexism, sexism, and racism. At the individual level, participants reported experiencing positive marginality and positive intersectionality, which is the recognition of ways that identities can support each other. At the community level, participants unearth LGBTQ+ POC specific environments for support, which possibly contributes to improved well-being.

Comparing the limited studies on LGBTQ+ POC concealment strategies, it seems it is difficult to determine if concealment strategies lead to more risk or resiliency. Additionally, these studies illustrate the lack of attention to LGBTQ+ POC code-switching strategies. Methodological differences and cultural factors may point to varying findings. More specifically, cultural factors may assist LGBTQ+ POC in becoming resilient as they use concealment and code-switching strategies to cope with their stigmatized identities. For example, research notes in racial and ethnic identity development models how individuals become more resilient as they encounter discrimination (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2014; Neblett & Carter, 2012; Romero, Edwards, Fryberg, & Orduña, 2014). Similarly, some research on LGBTQ+ POC suggests that family and ethnic-racial communities prepare them for dealing with anti-ethnic-racial stress through ethnic-racial socialization processes (Kuper et al., 2014). Such processes promote pride and self-esteem for dealing with ethnic-racial stigma in society (Kuper et al., 2014), which researchers believe LGBTQ+ POC utilize to deal with other forms of stigma (McConnell et al., 2018). These cultural factors may assist LGBTQ+ POC in making meaning out of the self and their experiences of social stigma, which enables them to avoid the harmful effects of concealing their stigmatized identities.

Meaning-Making & Negotiation/Concealment

Theorists have long postulated that a defining feature of what it means to be human is delineating and representing the world symbolically, essentially creating meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Bonanno, 2013; Frankl, 1946/1985; Kegan, 1982). The current study defines meaning-making as a person's unique interpretive filter for understanding themselves, their relationship to their surroundings, their surroundings, and the overall world (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012; Markman et al., 2013). While meaning-making is philosophically well-grounded, research on meaning-making is conflicting. Most researchers have conducted meaning-making studies

quantitatively, which others have suggested has added to these differing outcomes (Mattis, 2002; Park, 2010). This lack of consistency in meaning-making research is due to divergent operational definitions of meaning-making (Park, 2010), inadequate instruments (Bonanno, 2013), methodological limitations, and the absence of a norm model of meaning-making (Park & George, 2013). Thus, current literature describes varying meaning-making processes and outcomes (Park, 2010).

Additionally, researchers have explained that meaning-making that leads to the generation of meaning is considered more adaptive than meaning-making that leads to no positive outcome (Park, 2010). Overall, there are mixed results related to whether meaning-making may act as a buffer to stress, resulting in positive adjustment (Bonanno, 2013; Park, 2010). These differing results are due to the lack of consensus on an operational definition (Park, 2010) and methodology limitations (Park & George, 2013). In addition, meaning-making is not only an intrapsychic activity. It also includes interpersonal and cultural aspects (Park, 2010), which may attribute to the lack of consistency in linking meaning-making to positive adjustment.

There is a single higher education study that examines the lived experiences and meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their social identities within sociocultural environments. Pena-Talamantes (2013) qualitatively studied the meaning-making structures of six Latinx Lesbian and Gay students as they negotiated their identities at home and college. The researcher utilized a narrative, thematic analysis, and figured worlds theory to explain the self-authoring (meaning-making) of Latinx Lesbian and Gay students. Figured worlds theory is a non-stage model identity development theory that surmises individuals are the executors over their identity construction (Holland et al., 1998). There are four contexts in which identity construction occurs: figured worlds, positionality, space of authoring, and making worlds (Holland

et al., 1998). These contexts help explain the socially and culturally constructed worlds people exist in and how individuals produce self-knowledge.

Results from Pena-Talamante's (2013) study illustrate how Latinx Lesbian and Gay students created a self-authored identity buffer of self-acceptance that helped them negotiate their identities in stigmatizing home and college environments. This self-authored identity buffer helped participants conform to their environment's norms without undermining their perceived sense of self. Results indicate how positive self-authoring acts as a resilience mechanism that buffers Latinx Lesbian and Gay students from adverse effects of multiple minority stress as they negotiate their identities in stigmatizing social environments. With the use of figured worlds theory, this study represented how the student's self-authored identity buffer aided LGBTQ+ POC in becoming resilient as they negotiate their stigmatized identities. It helped understand how Latinx Lesbian and Gay students came to understand their stigmatized identities, which provided a buffer against the adverse effects of concealing their identities. However, in Baxster Magolda's (2008) theory of self-authorship, she notes other meaning-making structures central to people's lives. Baxster Magolda identifies beliefs, identity, and social relationships as essential dimensions in which people develop self-knowledge and meaning.

Additionally, Baxster Magolda's (2008) theory defines meaning-making as a developmental and contextual process that includes internal and external influences on meaning-making. Pena-Talamante's use of figured worlds theory failed to capture the transactional nature of meaning-making, which encompasses external contexts. Therefore, to understand the lived experiences and meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal or negotiate their social identities, researchers must recognize the influences of culture and external environments. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences and meaning-making

structures of LGBTQ+ POC as they negotiate and conceal their stigmatized social identities within sociocultural contexts. This study aimed to fill this research gap and provide counselors and educators of counselors with knowledge to help collaborate and develop interventions to address LGBTQ+ POC layered and contextual concerns. The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. What are the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?
2. What are the meaning-making structures, and embedded cultural resources of LGBTQ+ POC who conceal and negotiate their stigmatized identities within sociocultural environments?

Philosophical Assumptions & Theoretical Foundations

An essential feature of qualitative studies is for the researcher to delineate the philosophical assumptions influencing their research design (Creswell, 2017). These assumptions explain the researcher's beliefs about ontology (reality), epistemology (knowledge), axiology (values), and the research processes that inform their study (Creswell, 2014). Huff (2009) states that the researchers' philosophical assumptions can influence the development of research questions and methods used in a study. Therefore, the current study is guided by a bricolage of philosophical assumptions, which influenced the development of all components of the research study. Specifically, my philosophical assumptions are synonymous with critical theory, which assumes that reality is mediated by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender institutional structures (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theorists consider the historical context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and how power, domination, and ideology affect people's behaviors, personal

meaning, and communication processes (Kushner & Morrow, 2003; Pitre et al., 2013). Critical theorists aim to transform and liberate people within these structures (Kushner & Morrow, 2003).

Furthermore, this study, the data collection and analysis process are guided by the following theories: Self-authorship Theory and Intersectionality. To begin with, self-authorship theory is foundationally rooted in Kegan's (1982) theory of evolution, a holistic human developmental theory that describes people's meaning-making structures across the lifespan. Embedded in student development scholarship, Baxter Magolda (2008) describes self-authorship as a sophisticated form of meaning-making where individuals internally define their own "beliefs, identity, and social relationships" (p. 269). According to Baxter Magolda & King (2012), self-authorship has three major phases: external meaning-making, crossroads, and internal meaning-making. Previous research has established the use of self-authorship in examining the meaning-making structures of LGBTQ+ people (Abes & Jones. 2004). Self-authorship theory is immensely relevant to the current investigations which seek to explore the meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC.

Intersectionality is not a new or innovative practice originating from the legal scholar, Kimberle Crenshaw's article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." Crenshaw (1991) is irrefutably responsible for coining the term intersectionality. However, scholars note the earliest trace of intersectional ideals in Sojourner Truth's speech at an 1851 women's right's convention in Akron, Ohio (Bowleg, 2008; Bowleg, 2012; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). According to Collins (2015) "the term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2). It is not a comprehensive identity theory

(Crenshaw, 1991) with fixed procedures for implementation (Bowleg, 2012; Cole, 2009). Instead, it is a framework or embodiment shift for conceptualizing social categories (Cole, 2009). As an analytic method, intersectionality is not only concerned with describing and critiquing power structures and how it creates a stratified society; an intersectional analysis must also demonstrate social justice and understand how multiply marginalized people resist subordination (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). In the current study, intersectionality was used to describe and analyze the experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who live at the intersections of multiply marginalized identities.

Together, self-authorship and intersectionality will aid in describing and analyzing the lived experiences and meaning-making process of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate and conceal their social identities. The meaning-making processes of LGBTQ+ POC will be better represented because these approaches helped me understand the internal and external factors affecting participants' meaning-making processes. Lastly, these approaches may assist in retelling how LGBTQ+ POC experience social stigmas while resisting and combatting these contexts through various methods like meaning-making.

Method

Critical narrative inquiry derives from narrative inquiry. critical narrative inquiry is a methodology that allows researchers to investigate participants' stories through a social, historical, political, cultural, and ideological lens (Barone, 1992; Duran, 2019; Rudman & Aldrich, 2017). Critical storytellers' primary objective is to "empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices" (McLaren, 1989, p. 160). Critical narrative inquiry is distinct from narrative inquiry because narratives are not exclusively conceptualized as individually shaped and constituted (Rudman & Aldrich, 2017). Instead, narratives in critical narrative inquiry are socially

constituted. This acknowledges that individuals make meaning of their experiences within socio-political realities (Hardin, 2003; Rudman & Aldrich, 2017). As a result, critical narrative investigations include critiques of the sociopolitical realities that impact people's experiences of being-in-the-world. Furthermore, critical narrative inquirers include a political stance in their investigations. They reject apolitical narratives because they are insufficient to understand people's storied lives and transform their contexts (Barone, 1992). A critical narrative inquiry was overwhelmingly harmonious with the aim of the current proposed study. A critical narrative methodology helped provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC and the meanings attached to these experiences as constituted within sociocultural environments. A critical narrative approach also aided in accessing contextually laden knowledge located in the stories of LGBTQ+ POC, which includes knowledge about the self, and relational, social, cultural, and institutional influences that shape these stories through time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Procedure

The current study employed purposeful and snowball sampling methods to attain expert informants who could best address the study's research questions. I sent recruitment emails to various LGBTQ+ agencies in the United States to recruit participants. Additionally, I used social media announcements to recruit participants (Facebook, Instagram, Linkedin, and Gay social apps). The recruitment emails and social media announcements clearly explained the purpose of the research study, listed my contact information, and a link to a Qualtrics survey for people expressing interest. This questionnaire included questions about participants' age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, region, and pseudonym identification. I emailed seventeen potential

participants who completed the questionnaire and received a response back from ten individuals who participated in this investigation (See table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Current Residence
Black or African American (4)	Cis-women (4)	Bi-curious (1)	$\bar{x}$ = 26.7	South (6)
Hispanic/Latinx (4)	Cis-men (5)	Bi-sexual (2)	M = 27.5	West (3)
Multiracial (1)	Trans-man (1)	Gay (3)	Min = 19	Northeast (1)
Southwest Asian (1)		Queer (4)	Max = 33	

Note. (n=10); *Aggregate participant demographics used to protect participants confidentiality

Data Collection and Analysis

In general, narrative researchers are interested in context and gather an in-depth understanding of participants' storied experiences (Andrews et al., 2008). As a result, narrative investigations typically use multiple forms of data to develop a thorough understanding of the participant's lived experiences (Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, the literature illustrates how narrative investigations use multiple interviews to understand contextual factors and develop relationships with participants (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Multiple interviews help clarify points made and generate more content after parties have reflected on the initial interview (Knox & Burkard, 2009). Also, a previous narrative investigation centered around LGBTQ+ people and identity used multiple interviews to collect data (Abes & Jones, 2004). Therefore, the present study used two semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted between 45 mins to 60 mins, where I asked participants open-ended questions to gain an in-depth understanding of their experience. The first interview focused on learning as much as possible about participants lived experiences related to social stigma and negotiation/concealment processes. The second interview focused on how

participants make sense of their lived experiences related to social stigma and negotiation/concealment processes. I asked clarifying and follow-up questions to participant's responses. This helped me understand the meanings attached to their lived experiences (Seidman, 1991). I conducted the interviews via Zoom, a video encrypted communication software. Participants were provided a specific password-protected code to join the interview. This provided an additional level of confidentiality to the research process.

The majority of previous narrative investigations studying LGBTQ+ people and identity used a thematic analysis method to analyze the data (Abes & Jones, 2004; Duran, 2019; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011; Pena-Talamantes, 2003). Thus, the current data was analyzed thematically using Braun et al. model. A thematic analysis is a method of analysis where the researcher identifies patterns or themes within the data (Braun et al., 2014). I focused on the "what" rather than the "how" in participants' narratives (Reissman, 2008). I used an inductive approach to analyze the themes. An inductive approach assisted me in understanding the emerging themes from the data. Intersectionality and self-authorship theory assisted me in making sense of the generated data.

Promoting Credibility

Engaging in high-quality qualitative research helps communicate understanding, goodness, utility, and distinction from quantitative research (Tracy, 2010). This distinction is warranted because qualitative work is interpretive, and the researcher is the instrument (Creswell, 2017). Therefore, when making judgments about the "validity" of qualitative investigations, it is essential to determine if credibility is achieved (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Tracy (2010) refers to credibility as finding the researcher trustworthy and the results plausible and persuasive. Also, credibility focuses on the analysis process, which leads the reader to "act on or make decisions in line with"

the interpretations discovered (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). Credibility can be consummated through various procedures like thick descriptions, triangulation or crystallization, audit trails, peer reviews, and member checking (Bloor, 2001; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tracy, 2010). The procedures used largely depend on the philosophical assumptions guiding the researcher's investigation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Thus, I achieved credibility and maintained integrity throughout this investigation by implementing a pilot study, bracketing interview, reflexive journal, member reflections, peer debriefing, and using thick descriptions to triangulate the data. I also fulfilled all of Auburn University's Institutional Review Board's ethical and legal requirements. I used pseudonyms, fictitious identifiable details, and a password-protected storage drive to protect participants' confidentiality.

Findings

In this section, I delineate the findings that emerged from ten participants' shared meaning-making experiences while negotiating and concealing their stigmatized social identities within varied sociocultural environments. I incorporated a rigorous narrative thematic analysis of twenty interview transcripts. I used intersectionality and self-authorship theory as my interpretive lens to develop the themes and explain the findings. The following major themes materialized from this undertaking: (a) *Pervasive Interactions with Oppressive Systems*, (b) *Situational Decision-Making Process*, (c) *Stigma Management Strategies Means Adapting*, (d) *Affirming Contextual Influences*, (e) *Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter*, (f) *Meaning-Made within Oppressive Systems to Dismantle Internalized Oppression*. Most of these themes included subthemes, which I described below.

Pervasive Interactions with Oppressive Systems

Pervasive interactions with oppressive systems unearth the power structures influencing participants' decisions to negotiate and conceal their identities. These power structures could potentially impact how participants make sense of themselves, others, and their beliefs. Participants voiced oppressive systems like racism, sexism, cissexism, heterosexism, and xenophobia as impacting their lived experiences. All participants described widespread encounters with oppressive systems occurring in multiple sociocultural environments. It is important to note that social groups perpetuate oppressive systems and are not inherently stigmatizing. Two subthemes emerged, *explicit: experiences of socialization and discrimination* and *implicit: intersectional invisibility and dissonance,* which captures the features of these power structures.

Explicit: Experiences of socialization and discrimination. *Explicit: Experiences of socialization and discrimination* details participants' encounters of stigmatizing messages, expectations, and unjust treatment due to their socially denigrated identities. Participants primarily focused on heterosexist messages, expectations, and experiences from different social contexts across the lifespan. However, some of their stories capture other oppressive systems, like racism, cissexism, and xenophobia.

Participants reflected on encountering stigmatizing messages, expectations, and unjust experiences from family members, peers, religious institutions, and broader society. Participants described indirect or direct situations. As a whole, these encounters are obvious ramifications of holding devalued social identities within oppressive systems—all of these sociocultural context's help create and maintain oppressive systems of power. For example, Miguel, one of the participants, generally expressed the heterosexist messages he experienced in various contexts.

> I think in general, like definitely all those pieces from like friends and family and obviously like media. For me, it was like, yeah this is something that I'm never going to tell anyone, that I have these sexual attractions towards men.

All of the participants shared experiencing stigmatizing messages, expectations, and unjust treatment by family members. For example, Jaz reflected on hearing "homophobic" comments from her mother. She shared, "my mom would always make faces or comments, I think she low-key is, actually not low-key, I think she is homophobic. She makes comments about movies and some songs." Similarly, Dee shared,

> Even growing up my aunt on my dad's side, she made a comment, she was like, "yeah, I know y'all boys don't need to be gay cause y'all know your uncles or your dad is going to have a fit." That made it worse.

Implicit: Intersectional invisibility and dissonance. *Implicit: Intersectional invisibility and dissonance* describes the insidious impacts of oppressive systems on participants as a result of their interlocking social identities. Participant narratives suggested that they felt unseen and experienced internal conflict as a result of their stigmatized intersecting identities. For instance, several participants shared their experiences interacting in queer white spaces. Esequiel spoke of the lack of "racial talk" in white queer spaces, which reflects feeling unseen in the wholeness of his experience as a queer person of color. He reflected, "and so, I guess that changed cause like when I would go to queer areas, it was like, you're gay, like all of this, but no racial talk, no talk about culture, these kinds of things." Miguel discussed this same intersectional invisibility he experienced in white queer spaces.

> And then here in LA it's like, you all wanna listen to Britney Spears and Dua Lipa. I'm like Kylie Minogue, yes great, but also what can we do a little bit different? I mean even when

> I talk about white people, when they're annoying and like do messed up things, I just want to talk freely about it, but you can't really do that unless this person has done the work and completely understands it, and is not going to internalize it. And so that's not a lot of the white people here. They'll be like, “oh, I'm liberal, voted for Joe Biden.” But if you mentioned anything like that, it might still be a little bit of defensiveness. I might look at you a different way. So that's a piece of it as well.

In contrast, Camila described feeling unseen and frustrated in ethnic-racial spaces due to being a multiracial queer woman.

> I have been in a lot of spaces that have been predominantly Black, socializing, and something has been said related to like immigrants or Latin X individuals, or even sometimes like queer folks or a lack of understanding about like a gender nonconforming, gender queer folks. That's been frustrating and also upsetting because it's like, I'm in a space where I'm affirming, like who I am racially, but then all these other identities I hold are not as affirmed or supported here.

Situational Decision-Making Process

Pervasive interactions with oppressive systems gave rise to *situational decision-making process.* These systems caused participants to assess and make decisions about their devalued social identities within various sociocultural environments. Therefore, *situational decision-making process* describes what participants think about when deciding if they will negotiate, conceal, or disclose their social identities within sociocultural contexts. More specifically, participants discussed decision-making processes with family, and other social interactions. This theme uncovers the situational and context-dependent aspects of decisions to negotiate and conceal,

including: the level of physical and emotional safety, trust and valuing of a interpersonal relationship, negative consequences, and securing a long-term relationship.

Some participants described the importance of physical and emotional safety in interpersonal interactions as influencing their decision to negotiate or conceal their identities. Esequiel reflected, “it’s just not safe in some areas.” Miguel also expressed having to consider his physical safety while living in an affirming city to make negotiation and concealment decisions in general social interactions.

> I really don't have to think twice about like disclosing my sexual orientation. It's just like being gay is like normal here…But also reflecting on it a little bit more, I don't always feel like a hundred percent myself here. And I think its like due to a perceived sense of safety, I guess that's the word. And so, if I perceive I'll be safe in an environment, yeah, I am hundred percent of myself. But if I feel like not, then that's going to influence how I act.

Jaz spoke of emotional safety dictating her decision to negotiate or conceal multiple intersecting social identities with her mother.

> But it’s is about emotional safety. I don't feel like I will be physically harmed, but I do feel like I'll be judged, and it will cause me a lot of emotional exhaustion just to try to explain myself to death. And I already feel like I have to explain in other aspects, like she still expects me to be a doctor and it's like, I said no to the medical school admissions, it's not going to happen. My mom doesn't even know I'm a pole dancer and I've been dancing for over two years. And she probably gonna find out now because I have a lot of relatives that follow me on my main page, and it is what it is.

Stigma Management Strategies Means Adapting

Stigma management strategies means adapting, details the behaviors and techniques participants contrive to manage social stigma within varying sociocultural environments. Participants mostly described strategies to negotiate or conceal their sexual and affectional identity, rather than express it. Two subthemes emerged that represent the medium used when enacting stigma management strategies: *conforming and avoidance, and social media processes.*

Conforming and Avoidance. *Conforming and avoidance* includes appearance, and behavior changes participants made to fit dominate group norms. Participants described implementing these strategies in different social contexts. For instance, the majority of participants identifying as men mentioned changing their clothing to appear "masculine" and "straight." Dee expressed changing his appearance in heterosexual spaces to appear masculine. He reflected, "hmm, I did it through the clothes I wore. Um, yeah, it's more so the clothes I wore because people thought you were gay based on what you wore. So not wearing tight clothing and stuff." Comparably, Esequiel expressed, "It's usually when I'm in straight spaces. So, if I'm in these spaces, I'll wear bigger clothes. I don't wear as much of my furry things sometimes and change the way I sit." Miguel mentioned changing the way he dressed when going to heterosexual beaches. He shared,

> If I go to the beach, and it's a gay beach, I wear a speedo. But when I go to like Venice or Santa Monica, there's still like a little bit of hesitation of being my full self with how I express myself. Even with speedos versus like shorts.

Social Media Processes. *Social media processes* specify the negotiation and concealment strategies participants implemented via social media. For example, Tremaine spoke of not showing his face on gay dating apps to hide his identity. He reflected, "any app that I'm on, no face, just trying to stay very low-key profile." Some participants described having a private and public social

media account to conceal their sexual and affectional social identity. Mikail shared having a private and public social media account. He expressed concealing by posting significant others as best friends on his public social media accounts.

> I don't put that I'm gay on social media, at all. I wouldn't at least on my public Instagram. I would never say I'm gay. I would never post if I had a significant other. If I did post them, I would guise it under like best friends. I would never do that on my private Instagram or Snapchat. I wouldn't mind because again I control the people on there.

Affirming Contextual Influences

Affirming contextual influences describe the factors impacting participants progression towards developing internally driven meaning as they negotiate and conceal their identities within stigmatizing sociocultural contexts. Participants affirming contextual influences embolden them with a felt sense of power and space to challenge broader stigmatizing stereotypes, messages, and beliefs. Two subthemes captured the different affirming contextual influences: *Internal: Embodied Community and Cultural Power Source* and *External: Micro & Macro Spectrum of Supportive Spaces.*

Internal: Embodied community and cultural power source. *Internal: Embodied community and cultural power* source details participants community and inherited values that provide strength, resiliency, and pride. These cultural strengths appear to act as an unlimited supply of protection against the negative effects of living in stigmatizing sociocultural environments. It provides a pathway for developing personal meaning where participants rely on their inner voices versus oppressive contexts to make sense of their overall existence. This internal power source is embedded on the outside of the meaning-making filter.

Participants frequently shared family stories and collective cultural values that has shaped their positioning and understanding in the world. For example, Jaz reflected on transgenerational resiliency that she is reimaging for herself.

> I think culturally, my mom has made me very aware of the resilience it takes to make it through hardships, especially, knowing my mom grew up in the fifties, seeing a lot of racial discrimination, and in Mississippi there's still segregated schools in 2021. I feel the resiliency in my bones. I know my ancestors had to have been strong to successfully have made it through a lot for us to be here. And I'm grateful for that. However, I feel like that type of resiliency was needed at that time. And now I have a little bit more freedom to redefine that resiliency in my way.

External: Micro & Macro Spectrum of Supportive Spaces. *External: Micro & Macro Spectrum of Supportive Spaces* represents varying levels of affirming spaces that promoted self-exploration, education, and agency. Participants described interpersonal relationships (micro level) and college (macro level) as supportive contexts. These supportive contexts enabled participants to question the roles, norms, and beliefs they had been socialized into by differing sociocultural environments. Participants encountered these supportive spaces as they negotiated and concealed their social identities in unsupportive environment. Willow reflected on this in describing a friend who helped her reframe her thoughts.

> You know, she helps me reframe the thoughts or messages or things that I hear. So that helps a lot, like that personal relationship that we have, because a lot of times I can't just do it on my own.

Participants reflected on other interpersonal relationships, like the therapeutic relationship, that provided space for them to feel affirmed and make sense of their reality amongst a host of

socially enforced categories. For example, Jaz stated, “finding a Black queer therapist who I've been going to for three years, and I just feel like she just gets it.” Mikail also discussed how he was able to make sense of what family means. He states, “I sought therapy for the first time, which was really amazing. I discovered that family isn't just by blood it's by the friends you make.” Some of the participants discussed the importance of an affirming college context and/or on-campus ethnic racial communities in feeling validated and supported. Miguel shared how college was encouraging space to question and unlearn socialized hegemonic beliefs and norms.

> It didn't take until I was in my 20s and then being in college and really understanding social justice identity and being in those spaces that I was able to move away from those ways of being socialized as a child and then my teens.

Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter

Fluid Self-Determined Meaning-Making Filter refers to an internally driven structure, which participants use to filter external contexts to make sense of themselves, others, and their beliefs. Participants seemed to subconsciously or consciously rely on their freedom to choose to make sense of their overall existence as they negotiated and concealed their stigmatized social identities. Additionally, participants self-determined meaning-making filter is fluid and developmental because external contexts still impact how they make sense of their existence. It seems participants developed this filter over time as they encountered external contexts. However, participants take an active role in deciding which contextual influences they use to make sense of their reality. Therefore, *fluid self-determined meaning-making filter* is the processing center participants utilize before they have developed a guided principle or belief about themselves and others.

Some participants implicitly describe the fluidity and developmental feature of the self-determined meaning-making filter. For example, Esequiel reflected on how he used to rely on stigmatizing contexts to make sense his beliefs. He stated, “but for me, I never believed that. I mean, I did for a little while, but then after I stopped believing that.” Tremaine shared the developmental aspects of this filter in his story about the homophobic religious teachings he encountered growing up. He implicitly noted how this experience passes through this self-determined meaning-making filter, creating an opportunity to “cancel out” what he’s been taught.

> We hold on to those truths and it's like when we have these desires, that it was wrong. So, I think just battling with the reasoning and rationale of what we've been told through religion, and just coming to terms with that…and kind of canceling out some of the ignorance that we were taught before people were a little more accepting.

Meaning-Made within Oppressive Structures to Dismantle Internalized Oppression

Meaning-made within oppressive structures to dismantle internalized oppression emerged after participants discussed how their self-determined meaning-making filter is internally rooted. This filter is the processing hub where participants had the freedom to choose which contextual influences they relied on to make sense of themselves, others, and what they believed. Thus, the meaning-made theme is the end product or outcome of filtering through contextual factors.

The meaning-made theme is a global framework that participants, implicitly or explicitly, used to understand their existence while negotiating and concealing their stigmatized social identities within oppressive structures. This framework appears to aid participants in dismantling internalize oppression as a result of filtering hegemonic stereotypes and messaging to develop an internally driven end product of meaning out of self and others. The meaning-made theme seems

to explain how participants can employ stigma management strategies while not seeing themselves as inferior or abnormal, like the messages received from oppressive structures. During their second interview, participants were asked to discuss how their collective social stigma experiences have shaped who they are, what they believe, and how they understand others as they negotiate and conceal their identities. Two meaning-made subthemes materialized: *The Self is worthy and valuable and humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems.*

The Self is worthy and valuable. In this subtheme, participants described how they understood themselves through a self-acceptance and self-love framework, as they negotiated and concealed their stigmatized identities within oppressive contexts. For instance, Esequiel spoke of having to redefine what beauty is for himself. He shared, "It's helped me re-establish what is beauty because the world has often told me, you are not beautiful, as a collective. You are not worthy." Similarly, Jaz reflected on how experiences of social stigma do not affect her as engages in stigma management strategies because she accepts herself. She stated "I'm just at a place where I care, but it doesn't affect me as much. And I accept myself as I am. And typically, you get on board eventually, so I can give you the time that you need." I asked Jaz to elaborate more on this idea. She then expressed,

> I guess just the experiences that I've been through and the lack of acceptance has made it more important for me to center my self-acceptance and not necessarily put all of my energy towards being accepted by external factors because they're ever changing.

Camila noted how she accepts herself and that oppressive systems are the problem. Like Jaz, and other participants, this framework seems to help her dismantle internalize oppression before it impacts the Self. She shared,

> I think a lot of it is not my problem. I am who I am. And if someone has a problem with me, that is their responsibility…I recognize like, can I curse? Is that a problem here? Like, fuck the system, like I do deserve to be here. I know who I am

Humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems. *Humanizing means seeing others within oppressive systems* is a meaning-made framework that participants developed after social stigma experiences with significant and non-significant others. This framework helped participants understand others from a holistic lens of empathy, which contributed to them successfully negotiating and concealing their identities while not internalizing oppression. Participants developed this framework by seeing others as existing within oppressive systems that have socialized them into this way of being. Miguel spoke to developing greater understanding for others as a result of socialization processes by oppressive systems.

> I understand that a lot of people never had friends or like never had someone close in their life that explained to them or shared their story… so I think that's why I handle it the way that I did. And I mean now more than ever, I have a better understanding of the world, and socializations…I know that everyone's been raised with like homophobic beliefs, language, thoughts, you know, like that's just sort of like the language that we've been raised with. And so, it's not their fault.

In sum, *meaning-made within oppressive structures to dismantle internalized oppression* is the end product after participants have filtered through contextual influences. It is an internally rooted, guiding global perspective that help participants employ stigma management strategies while not seeing themselves as deficit, like the messages received from oppressive structures. As participants encounter oppressive contexts, these frameworks serve as a protection barrier against internalized oppression.

Discussion

Current findings are consistent with previous research. For example, existing literature highlighting LGBTQ+ POC experiences of oppression and discrimination (Balsam et al., 2011; Fields et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Wilson & Miller, 2002), noted and captured their experiences of oppression in specific environments like college settings, ethnic-racial spaces, and white LGBTQ+ spaces. However, present findings captured a wide range of sociocultural environments and circumstances in which participants encountered oppression. Additionally, most of the previous studies investigating this research area did not incorporate an intersectional framework (Fields et al., 2014; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Wilson & Miller, 2002; Sung et al., 2015), which restricted researchers understanding of how these systems interlock and create power structures (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

Most participants described negotiating and concealing their sexual and affectional identity with family members. This finding is consistent with previous research that has highlighted the negotiation and concealment behaviors of LGBTQ+ POC (Fields et al., 2014; Ghabrial, 2017; Peña-Talamantes, 2013; Sung et al., 2015). For example, Sung et al. (2015) described the experiences of Asian American lesbian and bisexual women who negotiate their sexual and affectional identity around kin to maintain family honor and pride. Also, in this study, the trans- and cis-gendered male participants incorporated appearance change methods to a greater degree than female participants. This finding appears to be novel when compared to previous studies. Previous studies have noted appearance changes of specific gender groups within the LGBTQ+ POC population (Fields et al., 2014; Sung et al., 2015) and have noted gender differences in the use of other stigma management skills (Chrobot-Mason & Button, 1999). However, none of these studies note appearance change gender differences. A possible explanation for this finding could

be that the queer and bi-sexual women participants in this study are more feminine presenting, which is in line with gender binary dominant assumptions about women within the LGBTQ+ community (Blair & Hoskin, 2014).

Most participants described understanding family members, ethnic-racial communities, and others within colonized oppressive systems. This framework increased participant's empathy and understanding for others who perpetuate and maintain the functioning of oppressive systems. Previous research findings have emphasized how LGBTQ+ POC developed increased empathy and understanding for others (Sung et al., 2015). Still, the meaning-making component or progression towards developing this framework is novel to existing LGBTQ+ POC research. Also, similar studies generally discuss how participants empathize with others while failing to identify the specific groups for which this meaning was developed. Overall, these findings are significant because they support previous research on how LGBTQ+ POC use their global meaning frameworks, with embedded cultural strengths, to buffer the deleterious effects of internalized oppression. Researchers have posited that meaning-making (Frost, 2011) and culture strengths may buffer LGBTQ+ POC against internalized oppression (Moradi et al., 2010; Meyer, 2010) as they negotiate or conceal their socially denigrated identities. However, no empirical evidence exists that explains the link between meaning-making and cultural factors in buffering LGBTQ+ POC against this adverse effect. Overall, this finding is novel and increases our understanding of this phenomenon for LGBTQ+ POC.

Limitations of the Study

Although I implemented widely accepted methods to ensure rigor and trustworthiness throughout this critical narrative investigation, there are some potential limitations. One limitation

of the present study naturally relates to the researcher's subjectivity influencing the entire investigation. In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument, and is also the individual collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2017). Also, the interview process was co-constructed due to the methodological approach implemented. For example, critical narrative inquiry is a methodological approach situated in critical theory (Barone, 1992) and the transactional nature of reality (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). These situated philosophical assumptions guided the research decisions I made throughout this study. Thus, I was inextricably tied to this investigation and did not seek to remove my subjectivity from it. As a result, I ensured credibility was promoted by being transparent and implementing the following procedures: a pilot study, bracketing interview, peer debriefer, research journal, and member reflections. Other limitations may relate to the sampling method and sample size.

Implications for Future Research and Practice

The present study can inform studies investigating LGBTQ+ POC experiences of meaning-making and negotiation or concealment strategies in several ways. Future research should consider replicating this investigation by studying within-group LGBTQ+ POC populations separately (i.e. bisexual women of color, trans women of color), as this study revealed unique experiences of oppression for specific groups. Additionally, the current investigation's research design minimally captured the developmental aspects of meaning-making using self-authorship theory. Existing research studying incorporating self-authorship used a longitudinal design, which has shown to aid in understanding the contextual and developmental nature of meaning-making (Abes & Jones, 2004; Baxster Magolda, 2001; Baxster Magolda, 2008; Torres and Hernandez, 2007). Implementing a longitudinal design could also

increase understanding of negotiation and concealment processes through time. Therefore, future research can fruitfully explore this topic further by using a longitudinal research design.

Throughout this investigation, participant's narratives continuously emphasized the impact of interlocking forms of oppressive systems on their mental health and overall wellbeing. This finding clearly illuminates the need for counselors to orient to a multicultural and social justice praxis to address the layered concerns of LGBTQ+ POC. Counselors deficient in this praxis may be operating from a White-Eurocentric focus, which can lead to perpetuating oppressive systems and causing unintentional harm to LGBTQ+ POC (Crethar et al., 2008). Therefore, counselors need to continuously engage in critical reflexivity, embody cultural humility, and seek continuing education to orient themselves to understand and address the plight of LGBTQ+ POC. As a starting point, the cycle of socialization is a theoretical model that could assist novice counselors in their anti-oppressive practices to actualize multicultural and social justice competencies. More specifically, the finding above emphasizes the need for counselors to incorporate the ACA Advocacy Model in their practice to address the negative impact of oppressive systems on the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ POC.

Conclusion

In this study, I interviewed ten LGBTQ+ persons of color to understand their lived experiences and how they made meaning out of themselves, others, and their beliefs as they negotiated and concealed their devalued social identities. Their stories highlighted experiences with interlocking forms of discrimination and social stigma that seek to silenced, subjugate, and force change upon them. Yet, these individuals constructed methods for resisting domination and colonization by finding affirming spaces and embodying collective cultural strength to develop

internally driven meaning out of themselves, others, and their beliefs. More importantly, their stories emphasize a quote by Chris Colfer: "There's nothing wrong with you, but there's a lot wrong with the world you live in."

To fully address the well-being of LGBTQ+ POC, the findings demonstrate how counselors and counselor educators must reject apolitical positions because research demonstrates how counseling practice is inextricably tied to public policy and social justice issues (Goodman et al., 2015). Therefore, counselors need to become accomplice's, and advocates with and on behalf of this population at various levels of engagement to dismantle systemic oppression. In sum, participants stories emphasized how they are resilient, irreducible, and powerful beings. To this end, I leave you with this quote from one of the participants that others implicitly echoed through their experiences of being-in-the-world: "I'm just living my best life."

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Appendices

Appendix A

Recruitment Email – LGBTQ+ Organizations

Greetings! I hope this email finds you well! My name is Dwayne White, and I am a third-year Counselor Education Doctoral Candidate in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling at Auburn University. I am contacting you to ask for your help in soliciting participants for my dissertation research study entitled "Surviving Stigmatizing Sociocultural Environments: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into LBTQ+ POC Experiences of Meaning Making." I am completing this study under the direction of my faculty supervisor, Dr. Jamie Carney. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University (Protocol # 20-543 EP 2012).

I would appreciate your assistance by forwarding the request for participation (included below) to LGBTQ+ people of color that may qualify for this study. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Dwayne White, MS, LPC, NCC, CCMHC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Education
Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling
Auburn University
dmw0050@auburn.edu
(he/him/his)

Hello! My name is Dwayne White, and I am a third-year Counselor Education Doctoral Candidate within the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling at Auburn University. I would like to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study entitled "Surviving Stigmatizing Sociocultural Environments: A Narrative Inquiry into LBTQ+ POC Experiences of Meaning Making." I am completing this study under the direction of my faculty supervisor, Dr. Jamie Carney. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University (Protocol # 20-543 EP 2012).

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people of color as they negotiate or conceal their social identities to manage social stigma and discrimination. I am recruiting LGBTQ+ people of color participants who meet the following criteria: (1) are between the age of 18-35; (2) experience social stigma based on your social identities (e.g. sexual orientation, race); (3) sometimes engage in concealment, negotiation, or code switching processes to manage social stigma and discrimination; (4) and individuals living in United States.

Participants will be asked to participate in two 45-60-minute confidential Zoom (virtual) interviews to share their experiences. Participants will receive a $40-dollar Amazon gift card for participating in this study. If you would like to participate, please complete the one-two minute

screening and demographic survey, which includes informed consent documents. Your participation is voluntary, and your signature on these documents indicates your willingness to participate. Link to Screening and Demographic Survey: _____

If you qualify for this study, I will contact you by phone with more information, and to set up your first interview. If you do not qualify or are unable to participate but know someone who meets the criteria, please feel free to share this email and the attached flyer with them!

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

If you have any questions about this research study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

My email address is dmw0050@auburn.edu
My phone number is 334-219-6340

Respectfully,

Dwayne White, MS, LPC, NCC, CCMHC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling Education
Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling
Auburn University
dmw0050@auburn.edu
(he/him/his)

Jamie Carney, Ph.D., Humana Germany Sherman Distinguished Professor
Dissertation Chair
Coordinator, Counselor Education Doctoral Program
Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling
Auburn University
carnejs@auburn.edu
(she, her, hers)

Appendix B

Surviving Stigmatizing Environments

Be part of an important LGBTQ+ POC research study!

Do you identify as an LGBTQ+ POC?

Do you live in the United States?

Do you experience social stigma/discrimination?

Do you sometimes conceal, negotiate, or code switch your identities to manage this stigma?

If you are between 18-35 years old & responded *"YES"* to these questions, you may be eligible to participate. Participants will receive a $40 gift card.

The purpose of this research study is to understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ POC who negotiate or conceal their social identities to manage social stigma and marginalization. This study is being conducted by Dwayne White, doctoral candidate in the Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling at Auburn University. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University (Protocol # 20-543 EP 2012).

For more information contact:

Dwayne White, MS, LPC, NCC, CCMHC|dmw0050@auburn.edu| (334) 219-6340

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Version Date (date document created):1/12/2021

Allow Space for the AU IRB Stamp

Appendix C

Social Media Advertisement

Appendix D

Participant Screening & Demographic Questionnaire

This is a demographic form that will help us get to know a little bit about your background. Please try to answer all the questions as honestly as possible. Informed consent documents are also included that require your signature. If you qualify for this study, the primary researcher, Dwayne White (dmw0050@auburn.edu), will contact you by phone to discuss more information about the study and to set up a time for our first interview.

1. Email Address: _____
2. Telephone Number: _____
3. Age: _____
4. Gender Identity: _____
5. What are your preferred pronouns (e.g. he, her, they, zir)? _____
6. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)
    a. Black or African American
    b. Hispanic or Latinx or Spanish Origin
    c. American Indian or Alaskan Native
    d. Asian
    e. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    f. White
    g. Other: _____
7. Sexual Orientation: _____
8. Do you live in the United States?
    a. If yes, what state do you currently live in? _____
9. Which best describes where you currently live?
    a. Rural
    b. Urban
    c. Major Metropolitan Area
    d. Other _____
10. Where were you born and raised? _____
11. Do you experience social stigma and discrimination due to your social identities?
    a. Yes
    b. No

12. Do you sometimes negotiate, conceal, or hide your identities to manage social stigma?
    a. Yes
    b. No
13. Pseudonym (Fictitious name to protect confidentiality): _____

Appendix E

Informed Consent

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMED CONSENT
for a Research Study entitled
"Surviving Stigmatizing Sociocultural Environments: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into LGBTQ+ POC Experiences of Meaning Making"

Summary
You are being asked to take part in a research study. This research study is voluntary, meaning you do not have to take part in it. The procedures, risks, and benefits are fully described further in the consent form. The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ people of color (POC) as they negotiate or conceal their social identities to manage social stigma and discrimination. There will be a total of two 45-60 min video recorded interviews via zoom. You will be asked to complete the initial screening Qualtrics screening and demographic survey, which includes inform consent documents. You will be asked to participate in two 45-60 min video interviews to share your experiences, and asked to provide feedback after I have reviewed and analyzed your interviews. The only risk is related to the potential loss of confidentiality. There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. The benefit to the researcher is to help improve the counseling experience and services rendered for LGBTQ+ POC. The alternative is to not participate in this study. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University (Protocol # 20-543 EP 2012).

You are invited to participate in a research study to share your lived experiences as Lesbians, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other non-heterosexual (LGBTQ+), person of color (POC). The study is being conducted by Dwayne White, principal investigator, under the direction of Dr. Jamie Carney, Dissertation Chair, in Auburn University's Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling. You are invited to participant because you are an 1) LGBTQ+ POC living in the United States, 2) have experienced social stigma, 3) engages in negotiation and concealment behaviors to manage this stigma, and 4) are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete a one-two minute Qualtrics screening and demographic survey, which includes an inform consent document. Once completed, you will be asked to participate in two 45-60 min video interviews to share your experiences related to social stigma and negotiating and concealing your social identities to deal with this stigma. These interviews with transpire via Zoom, a video encrypted, secure communication software, and will be video recorded. After the interview process, your personal narratives

will be analyzed for themes. You will be emailed asking for your feedback about themes gathered from your interviews. Your total time commitment will be approximately 2.5 hours.

Participant's initials _____

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are minimal and related to breach of confidentiality. To minimize this risk, we will store all identifiable information in an Auburn University electronic box account, which is duo-password protected. Additionally, you will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym for the purposes of data collection, analysis and reporting. All video recorded interviews will be deleted immediately following transcription by the researcher.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? If you participate in this study, you can expect to assist in improving the counseling experience for LGBTQ+ POC by sharing your story. This study may provide you with a sense of empowerment and healing because you've shared your story. We/I cannot promise you that you will receive any or all of the benefits described.

Will you receive compensation for participating? To thank you for your time you will receive a $40 Amazon gift card.

Are there any costs? If you decide to participate, you will incur no costs for participating in this study.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, Department of Special Education, Rehabilitation, and Counseling.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. Information obtained through your participation may be used to fulfill an educational requirement, published in a professional journal, and/or presented at a professional conference. Pseudonyms will be used in place of participants identifying information when disseminating the findings of this study.

If you have questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Dwayne White at dmw0050@auburn.edu or (334) 219-6340. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

_____	_____
Participant's signature Date	Investigator obtaining consent Date
_____	_____
Printed Name	Printed Name

Participant’s initials _____

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol: "Surviving Stigmatizing Sociocultural Environments: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into LGBTQ+ POC Experiences of Meaning Making"

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer: Dwayne White
Interviewee (Pseudonym):

Interview #1

BRIEFING SCRIPT (verbal, in person)

Hello, _____! How are you doing on today? Once again, thank you for volunteering your time to sit down and talk to me today about your experiences of navigating stigmatizing environments. Let me tell you a little about myself. Again, my name is Dwayne White, a counselor education doctoral student from the Department of Education at Auburn University. I am in this field because I want to live a life of service. I believe this is my purpose in life and I am happy that you have decided to allow me to sit with you and gain some insight into your story.

Before we get started, I just want to make sure you have a thorough understanding of this process. So, as you know, I am conducting this study to understand LGBTQ+ people of color (POC) experiences of negotiating and concealing their identities within different environments. I believe, and research shows that LGBTQ+ POC experiences of social stigma from sociocultural environments are diverse. Research further shows people's reactions to these experiences are varied. However, there is limited understanding of how LGBTQ+ POC negotiate and conceal their identities to deal with sociocultural environments. I think knowing this information would be beneficial for other individuals within the community, mental health professionals, and other parties involved. Your story will help in understanding this process. Is all of this making sense?

Your total time commitment today for this interview is about 45 mins to 60 mins. There is minimal to no risk to you. The only risk is breach of confidentiality. However, all identifiable information will be redacted and stored in a secure file. There is no cost to you for participating and you will receive a $40 Amazon gift card upon completion of your second interview. If you change your mind about participating at any time, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Participation is completely voluntary. Do you consent for me to record our conversation? Excellent. Does all of this make sense so far? You have any questions?

Great, let's begin! I will ask you some questions and try to make it conversational and not an interrogation. Feel free to elaborate as much as you can. If you have any questions about a question or something you don't understand, feel free to stop me. We can also take a break if

needed. There are no specific guidelines related to how we conduct the interview, so I am here to make this process as easy for you as possible. So, please let me know if something comes up during this process for you that you need clarification on.

Interview Questions:

Development as an LGBTQ+ POC & Negotiation & Concealment Process

- Tell me a little bit about your experiences growing up from childhood to high school and trying to understand yourself as an LGBTQ+ POC.
    - Interactions with family, friends, school, community, and overall society?
        - Cultural values, traditions, beliefs?
        - Expectations, conflicts, pressures?
        - Affirming and non-affirming experiences?
    - Interactions on social media?
    - What factors influence your decision to negotiate or conceal?
    - How do you negotiate or conceal your identities (e.g. behaviors)? Other strategies/tools?
    - Changes to this decision-making process over time?

- Tell me about your everyday experiences post high school to now as an LGBTQ+ POC living in the South during our current social climate.
    - Interactions with family, friends, school, work, community, and overall society?
        - Affirming and non-affirming experiences?
    - Interactions on social media?
    - What factors influence your decision to negotiate or conceal?
    - How do you negotiate or conceal your identities (e.g. behaviors)? Other strategies/tools?
    - Changes to this decision-making process over time?

Other

- Is there anything else you would like to share that you think is pertinent to this study?

Debriefing Script:

Thank you again for being so transparent and sharing your story with me. It was an honor to sit with you and share this interaction. Do you have any questions for me at this time? If you have any questions about any information you provided or any questions regarding the study, please let me know. I am happy to provide any information to help answer questions you have about this study.

I want to reiterate to you that your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. OK? Now that we have completed the first interview, I will begin to transcribe and analyze the information you provided today. I will contact you within the next week to schedule our second interview. Is this ok? We can set up a time that works best for your schedule.

Again, thank you for your service and allowing me to share this space with you in discussing your story. This is no small feat and I am very appreciative of your participation.

Interview #2

BRIEFING SCRIPT (verbal, in person)

Hello, _____! How are you doing on today? Once again, thank you for volunteering to participate in this study and sitting down with me and talking about your experiences of navigating stigmatizing environments.

Before we get started, I want to reiterate that your total time commitment today for this interview is about 45 mins to 60 mins. There is minimal to no risk to you. The only risk is breach of confidentiality. However, all identifiable information will be redacted and stored in a secure file. There is no cost to you for participating and you will receive a $40 Amazon gift card upon completion of this interview. If you change your mind about participating at any time, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Participation is completely voluntary. Do you consent for me to record our conversation today? Excellent. Does all of this make sense so far? You have any questions?

Great, let's get started! So today I wanted to ask some follow-up questions related to what we discussed during the initial interview, how you've made sense of your experiences, and provide you with the opportunity to discuss any other relevant information that may have come up for you since our last conversation. Additionally, I wanted to talk through some of the themes I noted and receive feedback from you about what I gathered during our first interview. Again, if you have any questions about a question or something you don't understand, feel free to stop me. We can also take a break if needed.

Interview Questions:

First Interview Follow-up

- Do you have any other relevant or significant experiences pertinent to this study that you thought about since our last conversation that you would like to share?

Meaning Making Process

- Tell me about significant experiences of social stigma in your interactions with significant others in your life (family, friends, work colleagues, etc.)
    - Challenges and dilemmas?
    - How did you initially appraise and react to these manifestations of social stigma?
        - Emotional and cognitive response?
        - Why do you think you reacted that way?
    - How do you appraise, interpret, and view these experiences now?
        - What was the best/worst thing about these experiences?
        - Why do you think the ways in which you interpret these events has changed or stayed the same?

    - Tell me about significant experiences and relationships that helped you to understand yourself, your beliefs, and others. (Adapted from Baxter Magolda & King, 2007)
        - Past and currently?
        - Cultural values, beliefs, and strengths?
        - Changed or enhanced how you see yourself over time?
- How do you use these collective experiences help you negotiate and conceal your social identities in stigmatizing environments?
- How have your collective experiences as an LGBTQ+ POC shaped who you are, what you believe, and your relationships with others? (Adapted from Baxter Magolda & King, 2007)

Debriefing Script:

Thank you again for being so transparent and sharing your time and story with me. It was an honor and privilege to share this space with you. Do you have any questions for me at this time? If you have any questions about any information you provided or any questions regarding the study, please let me know.

Again, your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Now that we have completed the interview portion of the study. I will transcribe and analyze the information you provided today. I will contact you within the next week or two, asking for your reflection and input based on my findings. I will also provide you with the information to access your $30 Amazon gift card. Is that ok? Great!

Thank you for your time, energy, and your voice! We will be in touch.