

Spring 5-10-2020

A Quantitative Approach and a Qualitative Approach Towards Intersectionality among Individuals with LGBTQ+ Identities

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A Quantitative Approach and a Qualitative Approach Towards Intersectionality among
Individuals with LGBTQ+ Identities

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Submitted to the Honors College at
Bowling Green State University in partial
Fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with

UNIVERSITY HONORS

MAY 11, 2020

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Part I. Quantitative Research

ABSTRACT

Victimization, as one of the heteronormative social stress factors, compromises sexual minority individuals' mental health. While individuals can be victimized because of their LGBTQ+ identities, they can be also victimized because of their racial/ethnic identities. Intersectionality theory suggests that the interaction between race and sexuality engenders unique experiences. I examined the relation between victimization experiences due to race/ethnicity and/or LGBTQ+ identities and emotional well-being outcomes (i.e., psychological distress, anxiety, internalized homonegativity, and internalized stigma of gender identity). 171 participants who identified with an LGBTQ+ identity from universities and colleges across the US answered an online survey: 69% of participants were White, 29.8% identified as gay/ lesbian, 24% identify as bisexual, 18.7% identify as queer, and the rest identified with unlisted sexual orientations. Victimization experiences were relatively low in this sample. Biological males, compared to biological females, experienced a higher frequency of victimization due to their LGBTQ+ identities and due to their race/ ethnicity. Participants identifying as male, transgender, and genderqueer/gender non-conforming/non-binary were significantly more victimized for their LGBTQ+ identities than those identifying as female. There was no relation between victimization experiences due to one's race/ ethnicity and psychological adjustment, but there were significant positive associations between victimization experiences due to one's LGBTQ+ identities and anxiety and internalized homonegativity. Future research should replicate this study with a larger national sample that consists of more people of ethnic minorities in order to understand the relation between victimization due to race/ ethnicity and that due to LGBTQ+ identities with respect to emotional well-being.

INTRODUCTION

VICTIMIZATION

RACE

In the United States, from 2014 to 2017, single-bias hate crime offenses motivated by racial bias had remained the most reported kind of all single-bias hate crime offenses, taking up to around 56% of all single-bias hate crime offenses, in the mentioned four years, combined (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017). During this time period, on average, African Americans were the primary targets of racially-biased hate crime offenses, which is justified by the fact that over 50% of those offenses were against this ethnic group (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017). Additionally, White individuals and individuals of Hispanic origins have been ethnic groups that have frequently reported having been victims of racially-biased hate crime offenses (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017). It is also important to consider victimization motivated by other biases over the mentioned time period.

LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES

In the United States, from 2014 to 2017, the average annual percentage of sexual-orientation-biased offenses was approximately 17.3% and that of gender-identity-biased offenses was approximately 1.7% (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017). Within this same time period, hate crimes motivated by sexual orientation bias were in the top three of the most committed kinds of hate crime, following hate crimes by religious bias and hate crimes by race/ ethnicity/ ancestry bias (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017). Additionally, hate crimes motivated by gender

identity bias ranked the fourth most reported type of hate crimes, following hate crimes by sexual orientation bias (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017). On the other hand, if considering per capita prevalence of single-bias hate crimes, LGBT individuals are more likely to be victimized than other minority groups (Park & Mykhyalyshyn, 2016). Remarkably, LGBT people report hate crimes more frequently than people being victimized because of their religion or race (Rubenstein, 2003). Researchers have come to understand that victims of person-based (rather than property-based) hate crimes are, at higher rates, LGBT individuals, when compared to victims of racially-biased or religiously-biased hate crimes (Rubenstein, 2003). From 2014 to 2017, gay male individuals had consistently been the most targeted victims of sexual-orientation-biased hate crimes, making up over 60% of all hate crime offenses based on sexual orientation in the mentioned four years (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2014, 2015, 2016, & 2017).

MENTAL HEALTH & VICTIMIZATION

MENTAL HEALTH AND VICTIMIZATION DUE TO RACE

As the rate of victimization due to race/ ethnicity is the highest in the United States, its psychological consequences must be examined. In a review paper, Craig-Henderson and Sloan (2006) highlight the unique aspects of race-based hate crimes and their impacts on victims. The authors point out that victimization due to race/ ethnicity subjects the victims to two kinds of cognitive struggles including realizing that the hate crime happened because of their race/ ethnicity and feeling powerless due to racial/ ethnic stereotypes (Craig-Henderson & Sloan, 2006). The first cognitive struggle is that,

while, for victims of other hate crimes, it is easy to believe that the hate crime that happened to them could have happened to just anyone, for victims of race-based hate crimes, it is difficult to deny that the hate crime that happened to them happened because of their race, something that is visible and recognizable (Craig-Henderson & Sloan, 2006). The second cognitive struggle is that, because extremely negative racial stereotypes almost always manifest through hate crime offenses and victims of the hate are perceived to be targets of those stereotypes, the victims develop a sense of powerlessness (Craig-Henderson & Sloan, 2006). Addressing the fact that White individuals are sometimes targets of racial victimization, the authors argue that the impacts of this kind of victimization have greater magnitude for people of color because racist hate crimes against these marginalized individuals have an extensive history and health psychologists believe that race impacts health status (Craig-Henderson & Sloan, 2006). They further specify this notion in light of anti-Black racist hate crimes, indicating that these crimes shift dormant feelings of anger, fear, and pain to the collective psychological forefront of the victim (Craig-Henderson & Sloan, 2006). As a result, victimization due to race/ ethnicity must exert a significant amount of force on racial/ ethnic minority individuals' mental health.

MENTAL HEALTH AND VICTIMIZATION DUE TO LGBTQ+ IDENTITIES

The fact that hate crimes motivated by anti-LGBT biases were the third most reported kind of bias-motivated hate crime undoubtedly raises questions about the relationship between victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities and mental health outcomes. In a study, Herek, Gillis, and Cogan (2000) observed the differences between gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals in terms of their experiences of non-bias

crimes and anti-LGBT-bias-motivated crimes and mental well-being. It was found that, for gay men and lesbians, more intense psychological distress was related to recent hate crime victimization and not a recent non-bias crime (Herek et al., 2000). Also, lesbians and gay men who had been assaulted or victimized in other person crime based on their sexual orientation within the previous five years had significantly abundant symptoms of post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression and anger than individuals who had experienced non-bias person crimes in this same period or no crimes whatsoever (Herek et al., 2000). In addition, other findings of the study aligned with a prevailing hypothesis in the literature that, as one experiences a hate crime, he or she will associate his or her post-crime vulnerability and powerlessness with his or her sexual orientation and personal identity (Herek et al., 2000). It is apparent that victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities has an immense impact on LGBTQ+ individuals' mental well-being.

INTERSECTIONALITY

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Originally, intersectionality theory or the concept of intersectionality were coined to highlight the distinction between the experiences of oppression of Black women and those of White women (Crenshaw, 1991). This notion underscores the fact that, although Black women and White women face the oppression of sexism, Black women are oppressed in a unique way due to the interaction between their race/ ethnicity and their gender (Crenshaw, 1991). Since its birth, intersectionality has entered numerous academic realms and disciplines such as history, sociology, philosophy, ethnic studies, or queer studies (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). The application of this concept has

transcended its original purpose, as it is used to evaluate the dynamics of difference and sameness while considering race, gender, class, sexuality, and other components of power that shape personal experiences (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Utilizing intersectionality as a framework, this study examines the interaction between LGBTQ+ identities and other marginalized identities, which can provide significant insights into gender minority and sexual minority individuals' mental health outcomes.

Applied in various sociological and psychological research circles, minority stress theory posits that a complex combination of discrimination, victimization, maltreatment, and harassment, which are produced by an intimidating, heteronormative, heterosexist culture, can predominantly explain many sexual minority health discrepancies (Meyer, 2003). According to Meyer (2003), minority stress is a source of chronic stress that is layered on top of general stressors, requires a unique adaptation effort, and originates from social processes, institutions, and structures. In addition, under the minority stress model, there are two distinguished concepts of stress. While distal stressors are manifested through external social conditions and structures such as discrimination, prejudice, or victimization, proximal stressors take place internally in individuals such as fear of rejection, rumination, or identity concealment (Meyer, 2003). Meyer (2003) also claims that, observing from a minority stress perspective, sexual prejudice exerts stress and can lead to adverse mental health outcomes. Despite this theory's acknowledgement of sexual minorities' distinct stressors, it neglects other unique stressors associated with racial/ ethnic minority identities that sexual minorities have. Also, little research has been done to expand the application of minority stress theory for individuals who hold various minority social statuses. This study aims to address the mentioned limitation by

accounting for participants' unique stress that stems from their sexual minority identities and racial/ ethnic minority identities simultaneously.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

As mentioned above, both types of victimization have strong and negative impacts on individuals' mental health. Therefore, it would make sense that, for a person who has endured both types of victimization, their mental health would be more compromised than those who have endured one type or the other. Thus, I hypothesize that victimization experiences due to race/ ethnicity interact with those due to LGBTQ+ identities and this interaction results in poorer mental health.

H1: The emotional well-being outcomes of people who report victimization experiences due to their LGBTQ+ identities and their race/ ethnicity will be worse than those of people who report only one kind of victimization.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

Participants of this study were 189 college students between the age of 18 and 24 from across the United States. 18 participants were removed from the final sample due to reasons such as incomplete responses or a lack of eligibility. The final sample included 171 participants (Mean age = 20.08, SD = 1.07). 118 individuals identified as Non-Hispanic White, while 53 individuals identified with minority ethnicities such as Black or African American, Asian, Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin, Middle Eastern or North African, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and not listed. 71 participants identified as female, 51 identified as genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/ non-binary, 30 identified as male,

15 identified as transgender, and 4 identified as not listed. In terms of sex assigned at birth, 138 participants identified as female, 32 identified as male, and 1 identified as intersex. In terms of sexual orientation, 51 identified as gay/ lesbian, 41 identified as bisexual, 32 identified as queer, 22 identified as pansexual, 10 identified as asexual, 8 identified as not listed, 3 identified as fluid, 2 identified as questioning, and 2 identified as heterosexual/ straight. 10 random participants were selected as winners of one \$25 Amazon gift card for each. The participants learned about the study from LGBTQ+-related clubs/ student organizations and diversity affairs offices at their universities.

MEASURES

Psychological Distress

Participants completed 10 items ($\alpha=.78$) in the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, S., 1988). The scale allowed assessment of the degree to which one appraises their life as stressful. The 10 items was administered after demographic questions.

Participants were asked to answer “In the last month, how often have you been... 0 = *Never*, 1 = *Almost Never*, 2 = *Sometimes*, 3 = *Fairly Often*, 4 = *Very Often*.” Scores are the sum of responses to the items.

Anxiety

Participants answered 7 items (Cronbach $\alpha=.92$) in Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7) scale (Spitzer et al., 2006). This scale measured generalized anxiety symptoms. The participants responded to GAD-7 immediately after PSS. They were asked “Over the last 2 week, how often have you been bothered by the following

problems?... 0 = *Not at all sure*, 1 = *Several days*, 2 = *Over half the days*, 3 = *Nearly every day*, 4 = *Always*. “ Scores are the sum of responses to the items.

Internalized Homonegativity & Internalized Stigma on Gender Identity

Participants who answered ‘Yes’ to “Are you sexually attracted to people of the same sex?” were asked to respond to a questionnaire about internalized homonegativity. Participants who answered ‘Yes’ to “Do you identify as a cisgender person?” were asked to respond to a questionnaire about internalized stigma on gender identity. Both of these questionnaires were adapted from The Personal Homonegativity and Morality of Homosexuality subscales of the Internalized Homonegativity Inventory (INHI) ($\alpha=.89$ & $.70$ respectively) (Mayfield, 2001). 15 items of this internalized homonegativity questionnaire measured one’s negative attitudes toward their sexuality which involves same-sex attraction. An example of one of the items is “Sometimes I get upset when I think about being attracted to people of my own sex.” Also, the questionnaire about internalized stigma on gender identity, which was designed to measure one’s negative attitudes toward their gender identity, was closely based on this adapted scale, consisting of 14 items. An example of one of items is “I sometimes resent my own gender identity.” Both questionnaires had six rating options for each item ranging from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree*. Scores are the sum of responses to the items.

Victimization Experiences due to LGBTQ+ Identities & Victimization Experiences due to Race/ Ethnicity

An LGBTQ+ victimization scale that the participants took were adapted from Direct Sexual Orientation Victimization items used in research on LGB youth victimization (D'Augelli et al., 2002). This 8-item scale was modified to evaluate the frequency of victimization due to gender identity and/ or sexual orientation with the prompt "In your lifetime, how many times have people done each of the following to you because of your gender identity and/ or sexual orientation (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, asexual, non-binary, pansexual, ...)?" The same scale, omitting the 'Threats to disclose your sexual orientation' item, was used to measure the frequency of victimization due to race/ ethnicity with the prompt "In your lifetime, how many times have people done each of the following to you because of your race/ ethnicity?". Both scales had four rating options for each item ranging from 1 = *Never* to 4 = *Three or more..* Scores are the sum of responses to the items.

PROCEDURE

Participants accessed the link to a Qualtrics survey through a recruitment email or flyer from LGBTQ+ clubs/ organizations and/ or diversity affairs offices at their universities. A consent form was presented immediately. It involved pertinent information such as research purposes, risks, benefits, rights of withdrawal, or confidentiality. As they consented, they were asked to respond to the PSS scale, GAD-7 scale, the internalized homonegativity questionnaire if they declared to have same-sex sexual attraction, the internalized stigma on gender identity if they declared to not identify as a cisgender person, a distractor questionnaire about civic

engagement, the LGBTQ+ victimization scale, and the race/ ethnicity victimization scale. Lastly, they reached the last page of the survey where they were offered the opportunity to enter an entry into our gift card raffle by accessing a given link and providing their email address. Participants' email addresses were not associated with the responses at all.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Table 1 illustrates descriptive statistics of the independent variables including victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities and victimization experiences due to race/ ethnicity and the dependent variables including anxiety scores, personal distress scores, internalized homo-negativity scores, and internalized stigma on gender identity scores.

Notably, the mean for self-reported frequency of being victimized due to LGBTQ+ identities and that for self-reported frequency of being victimized due to race/ ethnicity are relatively low in this sample. The mean score for victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities in one's lifetime is 1.8981, which is almost equivalent to "Once" on a four-point Likert scale from "Never" to "Three or More". The mean score for victimization experiences due to race/ ethnicity in one's lifetime is 1.2648, which is almost equivalent to "Never" on a four-point Likert scale from "Never" to "Three or More". For the dependent variables, the mean score for anxiety and that for personal distress are relatively medium in this sample. The mean score for anxiety over the past two weeks is extremely close to 3, which is equivalent with "Over Half the Days" on a five-point Likert scale from "Not at All Sure" to "Always". The mean score for personal distress over the last month is almost close to the middle value between 3 and 4, which are equivalent to "Sometimes" and "Fairly Often", respectively, on a five-point Likert scale from "Never" to "Very Often". On the other hand, the mean scores for internalized homo-negativity

and internalized stigma on gender identity are quite low in this sample. The mean scores for these variables are close to 2, which is equivalent to “Disagree” on a six-point Likert scale from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Victimization due to LGBTQ+ identities	171	1.00	4.00	1.8981	.68713
Victimization due to race/ethnicity	171	1.00	3.14	1.2648	.44766
Anxiety	171	1.00	5.00	2.8546	1.01507
Distress	171	1.90	4.80	3.3111	.57111
Internalized Homo-negativity	156	1.00	5.00	1.7615	.71566

Internalized Stigma on gender identity	83	1.00	4.50	2.2461	.91780
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Demographic Differences in Victimization Experiences

Differences due to race/ ethnicity groups

Tables 2 shows the difference between White participants and minority participants in terms of self-reported frequency of victimization experiences due to race/ ethnicity. Minority participants ($M = 1.71$, $SD = .54$) were significantly victimized because of their race/ ethnicity more than White participants ($M = 1.14$, $SD = .32$), $t(169) = 8.21$, $p = .000$. There were no significant race differences in victimization due to LGBTQ+ identities.

Table 2. Mean Differences between Victimization Experiences due to Race/ Ethnicity and Victimization Experiences due to LGBTQ+ Identities Categorized by White and Minority

	Mean for Minority	Mean for White	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Victimization due to race/ ethnicity	1.7105	1.1375	8.205	169	.000

Victimization due to LGBTQ+ identities	1.8271	1.9184	-.21	169	.401
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Differences due to sex assigned at birth

In table 3, it is shown that participants of the male sex ($M = 2.16$, $SD = .72$) significantly experienced a higher frequency of victimization due to their LGBTQ+ identities than those of the female sex ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .67$), $t(168) = 2.36$, $p = .019$. Additionally, participants of the male sex ($M = 1.40$, $SD = .57$) reported a marginally higher frequency of victimization due to their race/ethnicity than those of the female sex ($M = 1.24$, $SD = .41$). Thus, it can be inferred that people of the male sex generally report more victimization experiences due to their LGBTQ+ identities and their race/ ethnicity than those of the female sex.

Table 3. Mean Differences between Sex-assigned-at-birth Groups in terms of
Victimization Experiences

	Mean for Male	Mean for Female	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Victimization due to LGBTQ+ identities	2.1562	1.8416	2.361	168	.019
Victimization due to race/ ethnicity	1.3973	1.2350	1.856	168	.065

Sexual orientation differences in victimization

The ANOVA results showed no significant sexual orientation differences in LGBTQ+ victimization, $F(5,158) = 1.76, p = .12$. However, post-hoc between-groups comparisons did show that participants endorsing an asexual orientation, bisexual orientation, and pansexual orientation reported the lowest levels of LGBTQ+ victimization. The means and standard errors of victimization due to LGBTQ+ are shown in Table 4.

The ANOVA results showed no significant sexual orientation differences in victimization due to race/ethnicity, $F(5,158) = .267, p = .93$. The means and standard errors of victimization due to race are shown in Table 4.

Gender identity differences in victimization

The ANOVA results showed significant gender identity differences in LGBTQ+ victimization, $F(3,163) = 2.32, p = .002$. The means and standard errors of victimization due to LGBTQ+ are shown in Table 4. Means showed that individuals who identified as female had the lowest victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities compared to individuals of all other gender identities.

The ANOVA results showed no significant gender identity differences in victimization due to race/ethnicity, $F(3,163) = .508, p = .68$. The means and standard errors of victimization due to race are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Mean Differences in Victimization Due to LGBTQ+ Identity and Victimization Due to Race/Ethnicity

Demographic Group	Victimization Due to LGBTQ+		Victimization Due to Race/Ethnicity	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>				
Asexual	1.41 ^a	.217	1.19 ^a	.145
Bisexual	1.81 ^{ac}	.107	1.30 ^a	.072
Gay/lesbian	1.94 ^{bc}	.096	1.23 ^a	.064
Pansexual	1.88 ^a	.146	1.31 ^a	.098
Queer	2.09 ^{bc}	.121	1.28 ^a	.081
Not Listed	2.07 ^{bc}	.242	1.36 ^a	.162
<i>Gender Identity</i>				
Male	2.057 ^b	.122	1.343 ^a	.082
Female	1.666 ^a	.079	1.245 ^a	.053
Transgender	2.162 ^b	.173	1.314 ^a	.116
Gender queer/non-conforming/non-binary	2.059 ^b	.094	1.230 ^a	.063

Note. Means with the same subscript are not significantly different in between-groups contrasts, in least-squares differences tests.

Correlations between Victimization Experiences and Mental Health/Stigma Variables

It was found that victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities were positively correlated with anxiety, $r(169) = .221, p = .004$. This correlation implies that individuals who experience more victimization due to their LGBTQ+ identities experience higher levels of anxiety.

Also, the findings suggest that the positive relationship between victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities and internalized homonegativity was marginally significant, $r(152) = .147, p = .068$; individuals who experience higher levels of victimization due to LGBTQ+ identities experienced higher levels of internalized homo-negativity.

Additionally, we found that personal psychological distress was positively associated with internalized homo-negativity, $r(154) = .167, p = .038$; individuals who experienced higher levels of distress also experienced higher levels of internalized homo-negativity.

Examining Intersectionality: Interaction Effects of Victimization due to Race/Ethnicity and Victimization due to LGBT+ Identities

Regression analyses showed that there was no significant interaction effects between victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities and those due to race/ ethnicity for any of the four emotional well-being variables including anxiety, distress, internalized homo-negativity, and internalized stigma on gender identity, $p > .05$. In other words, there was no support for the hypothesis that being victimized due to both race/ethnicity and LGBT+ identity would combine to produce the highest levels of mental health symptoms.

DISCUSSION

As this sample experienced relatively low victimization due to both race/ ethnicity and LGBTQ+ identities and reported moderately positive emotional well-being outcomes, we are curious about the quality of emotional well-being outcomes for a sample that has experienced medium to high victimization due to race/ ethnicity and/ or LGBTQ+ identities. We speculate that higher victimization experiences would be correlated with poorer emotional well-being. Future researchers should attempt to recruit participants experiencing more victimization due to race/ ethnicity and/ or LGBTQ+ identities to observe whether there is a difference in terms of psychological outcomes.

The findings reveal that people who had been assigned at birth as male were significantly victimized due to their LGBTQ+ identities and almost significantly victimized due to race/ ethnicity, compared to people of other sexes. This conclusion highlights the fact that male individuals are more likely to experience double victimization. Intervention specialists and advocates should develop programs that curtail this double victimization in order to prevent any negative consequences.

Also, we found that people of female gender identity were least victimized due to their LGBTQ+ identities when compared to those of male, transgender, and genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/ non-binary gender identities. This finding may be justified by the common reality where men or boys are heavily criticized for exhibiting any feminine traits, while women or girls are less criticized for exhibiting masculinity. It seems that the existence of gay men, trans men, trans women, and genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/ non-binary individuals is perceived to threaten the social power dynamics based on the gender binary and heterosexuality. As a result, cisgender women may be the least likely targets for victimization against people with LGBTQ+ identities

As the results reveal that the frequency of victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities predicted anxiety levels, we believe that this finding holds clinical implications. If organizations and institutions develop community intervention programs reducing anti-LGBTQ+-biased victimization, anxiety levels of the population of interest may subside. As a result, special attention to prevention of victimization against individuals because of their LGBTQ+ identities ought to be provided.

In addition, it was found that psychological distress was significantly correlated with internalized homonegativity. Therapists and social workers should attempt to help clients lower their personal distress in order to accordingly lower internalized homonegativity and vice versa. This clinical implication emphasizes the uniqueness of LGBTQ+ individuals' distress where holding negative personal perceptions of and attitudes towards one's sexual orientation is related to being distressed.

More importantly, although we did not find a significant interaction effect between the two kinds of victimization, we encourage future researchers to replicate this study with a much larger sample, especially with a considerable number of people of color. We believe that the lack of a significant interaction effect was due to the discrepancy between the overwhelmingly large number of White participants and the modest number of participants of color in our sample. We also speculate that the reason why victimization experiences due to LGBTQ+ identities and those due to race/ ethnicity did not interact to predict the emotional well-being outcomes could be because of the relatively low self-reported frequency of both kinds of victimization of our sample. Additionally, another reason could be that social and emotional support that the participants had attained from LGBTQ+ student organizations, ethnic student organizations and pro-LGBTQ+ and pro-diversity resources and programs at their institutions helped protect these

individuals from many negative psychological ramifications following their experiences of victimization.

LIMITATIONS

We have identified a few shortcomings of this study that compromise its external validity and further implications, one of which is the participants' low victimization experiences. In the future, recruiting participants with varying levels of victimization experiences seems warranted. Another limitation is the representativeness of this sample. Because the sample was predominantly White and the sample size was not proportionate to the actual size of the LGBTQ+ college student community, the demographic breakdown of this sample may not be reflective of that of the population of interest. As such, the above limitations should be addressed in future research to maximize the practical implications of this study.

Part II. Qualitative Research

ABSTRACT

Salient identities are important identities that are displayed or enacted in most situations. Identity gaps refer to the conflicts between identities. Previous research has shown that identity gaps have impacts on the quality of communication, psychological outcomes, identity enactment, and self-labeling. Also, literature suggests there are various ways of negotiating identities to resolve identity gaps such as focusing on certain parts of an identity, choosing a neighborhood of certain identity, participating in an identity-based organization, or assimilating into or passing with a more socially accepted identity. Using the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), we aimed to explore a wide variety of salient identities, understand how salient identities can come in conflict, and investigate many pathways of identity negotiation among LGBTQ+ college students at Bowling Green State University (BGSU). We conducted in-depth interviews with 20 individuals who were between 18 and 24 years old, had at least one LGBTQ+ identity, and attended BGSU. We found that identity gaps and a lack of identity gap can be of either a single frame or multiple frames. There are three many identity negotiation strategies including ignoring the conflict, identity compartmentalization, and absolution of conflict. A lack of identity gap can lead to identity affirmation/ exploration. Various implications of this study help inform clinicians, social workers, community intervention specialists, and advocates' services for LGBTQ+ college students.

RATIONALE

SALIENT IDENTITIES

Identity salience regards the probability that a certain identity will be active across situations (Morris, 2013). Individuals rank their identities in a hierarchy; identities that rank higher in terms of salience have a higher likelihood of being enacted (Morris, 2013). Morris (2013) argued that greater identity salience stems from greater identity commitment. This relationship engenders a question about whether personal perceptions of the importance of an identity is separate from the likelihood of the enactment of such an identity. For example, Morris (2013) found that people did not always choose the identity that they identified as most important to their self-concept when given a behavioral choice between their two most important role-identities. Also, Morris (2013) pointed out the controversy in literature about the difference between identity salience and identity importance and asserted that the two concepts had a few key distinctions. Nevertheless, we decide to conceptualize them as the same in this study. We believe that, by allowing participants to select their two most important identities to discuss in the interviews, we address identity salience. In addition, as the participants share about their decisions to conceal, enact, or prioritize certain identities, we will learn about the importance of their identities. As a result, our research protocol ensures that this study addresses both identity salience and identity importance.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectional identities and the experiences of those who have these identities historically been studied with the anti-categorical or inter-categorical approach, which analyzes intersectional identities by observing dimensions within categories (McCall, 2005). Much

psychological research that has examined the interaction between multiple marginalized identities and its effects on LGBTQ+ individuals' mental health has applied an additive approach, which analyzes intersectional identities in a similar way as of the anti-categorical or inter-categorical approach. The additive approach is criticized for conceptualizing individuals' experiences separately and independently (Collins, 1995; Cuadraz & Uttal, 1999; Weber & Parra-Medina 2003). These approaches do not adequately allow insights into the complex experiences of individuals due to their multiple oppressed identities because they ignore the unique dimension of experiences that stem from the intersection of two or more minority identities. McCall (2005) suggests the intra-categorical approach, which observes the single dimensions generated by the intersection of multiple identities instead of the full range of dimensions of a full range of categories.

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) is considered to effectively allow understanding of identity at the intersection between many categories (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). CTI proposes that identity is composed of four facets or frames including (1) personal, (2) enacted, (3) relational, and (4) communal where the exchange of messages is involved (Faulkner & Hecht, 2006). The personal layer reflects identity as perceived and defined by the individual in various forms such as self-concept, preferred identity label, or self-image (e.g., I identify non-binary; I am gay/ lesbian). The enacted frame refers to an individual's identity that emerges in presentation through social interactions (e.g., dressing oneself in ways that express their gender identity and may challenge gender norms, engaging in cultural activities of my ethnic background). In addition, the relational facet pertains to aspects of identity that are shaped by social and personal relationships or relationships among different identities (e.g., being in a non-heterosexual romantic or sexual relationship). This frame can include how one defies the

imposition of certain identities by others. Lastly, the communal frame supposes the idea of identity being collective identification, an identity defined by a sense of belonging to a certain group (e.g., identifying with the Asian American community; having an attachment to an ethnic group; feeling included in the LGBTQ+ community).

IDENTITY GAPS

The four frames of identity are not always congruent with one another (Jung & Hecht, 2004). They can be either contradictory or exclusive of each other (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Despite the inconsistency, frames can still coexist and all contribute to an individual's identity (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Identity gaps refer to any discrepancies between or among the four frames (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Jung & Hecht (2004) specifically studied the personal-relational identity gaps and found that there are strong negative relationships between identity gaps and communication outcomes including communication satisfaction, feeling understood, and conversational appropriateness and effectiveness. Also, personal-relational identity gaps are also related to alienation, depression, and limited choices of identity enactments (Jung et al., 2007). Furthermore, in a study of Jewish Americans, Hecht and Faulkner (2000) found that the personal-relational gap in Jewish American identity influenced many aspects of the enactment of identity such as ways of enactment, time of enactment, and people around whom a person chose to enact the identity. Moreover, identity gaps impact self-identification over time (Diamond, 2008). As individuals seek response cues in a given situation to determine whether they feel comfortable to disclose or enact an identity, an anticipated negative response induces the need to change one's identity label (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Such findings prompt us to speculate about other ways that reveal how identity gaps can compromise identity enactments.

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION

The process of identity negotiation refers to a complex set of processes in which people aim to simultaneously balance their interaction goals and their identity-related goals such as the needs for agency, communion, and psychological coherence (Swann & Bosson, 2008). A closer look at identity negotiation will allow us to thoroughly understand how identity gaps can compromise or affect identities and the enactments of them. Identity negotiation assists with both interpersonal interactions and intrapersonal harmony (Swann & Bosson, 2008). The drives of identity negotiation processes persist after self-presentational activities end (Swann & Bosson, 2008). In other words, even when one does not have to present themselves in certain ways to other people, they still feel the need to engage in identity negotiation. It is clear that identity negotiation has important implications interpersonally and intrapersonally. Faulkner and Hecht (2011) studied how closetable identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or Jewish were managed. It was found that the participants' enactments of LGBTQ+ and Jewish identity demonstrated a continuum (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Some of the identity management strategies were focusing on only parts of identity, selecting a non-Jewish or Jewish person as a relational partner, residing in a predominantly Jewish or predominantly LGBTQ+ neighborhood, engaging in a Jewish or LGBTQ+ social network, or participating in Jewish or LGBTQ+ organizations (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Alternatively, for many participants, to combat negative societal reactions to being both LGBTQ+ and Jewish was to assimilate and pass as Christian and/or heterosexual (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Surprisingly, engaging in identity negotiation can put individuals at risk of alienation, estrangement, and hostility, which may contribute to the crime statistics showing that Jewish people and LGBTQ+ people are among the most victimized groups (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Interestingly, Faulkner and Hecht (2011) found that

highlighting one part of identity such as mainly LGBTQ+ or Jewish allowed some individuals to deepen their belonging in a community and discover the support that is integral to their personal development, while attempting to focus on all elements of identity such as being LGBTQ+ and Jewish subjected to immense challenges. We expect to our findings to be congruent with these findings in literature. Also, we aim to explore the various nuances of identity negotiation that past research has not addressed.

RESEARCH PURPOSES

One of the study's main purposes is to learn about a wide variety of identities that an LGBTQ+ college student perceives to be most important. Although LGBTQ+ identities are often regarded as most salient, it is possible that there are other identities that LGBTQ+ college students personally believe to be just as salient. Another purpose is to identify possible identity gaps existing between two salient identities in terms of the four frames in the Communication Theory of Identity. This purpose allows us to explore the implications of intersectionality with a qualitative approach. The third purpose of the study is to understand how LGBTQ+ college students engage in identity negotiation to reconcile identity gaps. Investigating many alternatives of identity negotiation will provide insights into the impacts of the complex mechanisms of identity intersections on LGBTQ+ college students' sense of identity.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The sample included 20 Bowling Green State University undergraduate and graduate students who had at least one LGBTQ+ identity and were between 18 and 24 years old.

The following figures illustrate the demographic breakdowns of the sample in terms of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

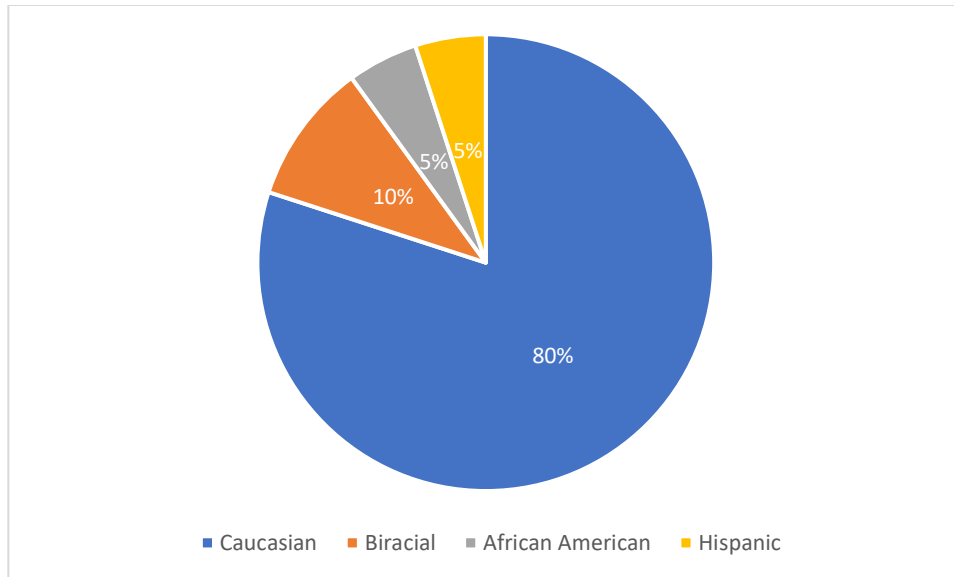


Figure 1. Ethnicity Breakdown

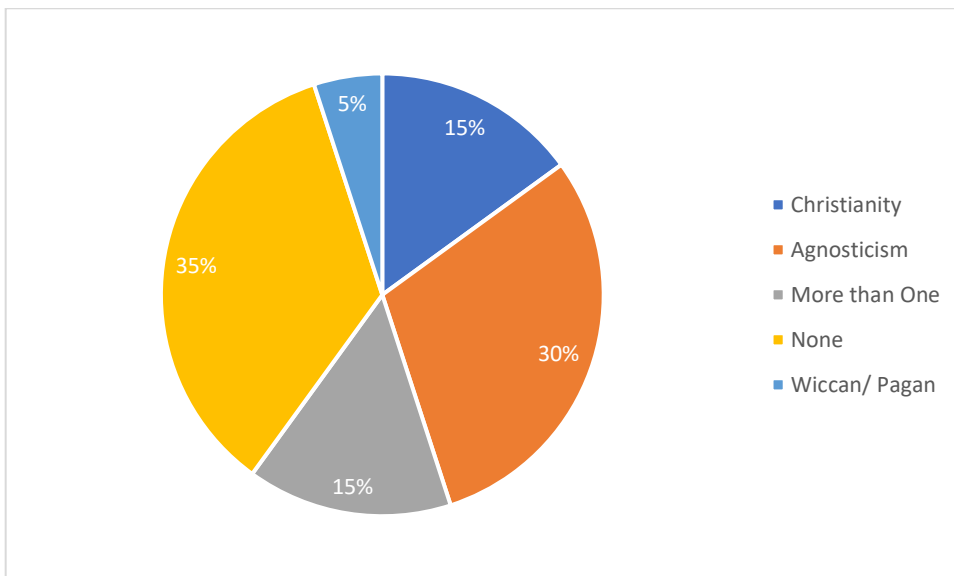


Figure 2. Religious Affiliation Breakdown

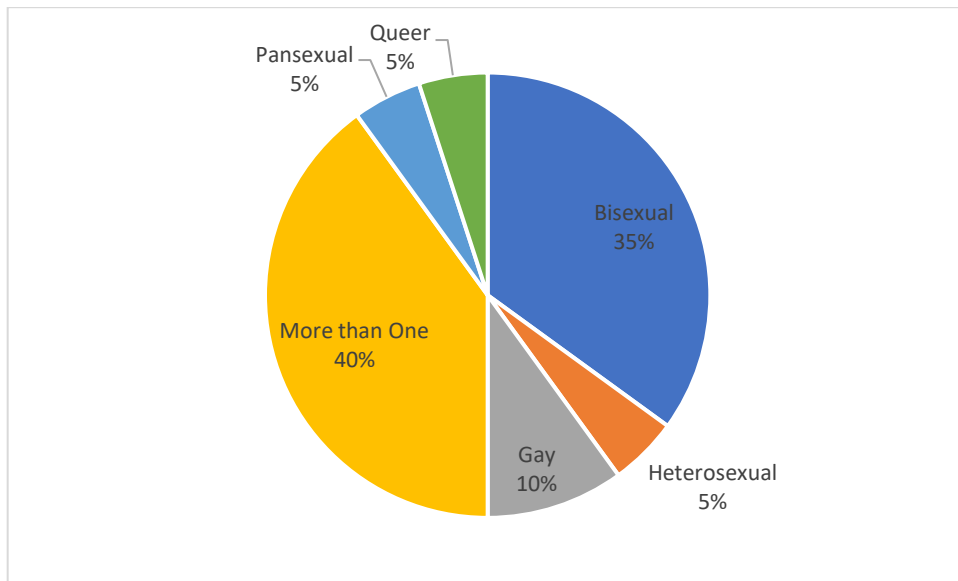


Figure 3. Sexual Orientation Breakdown

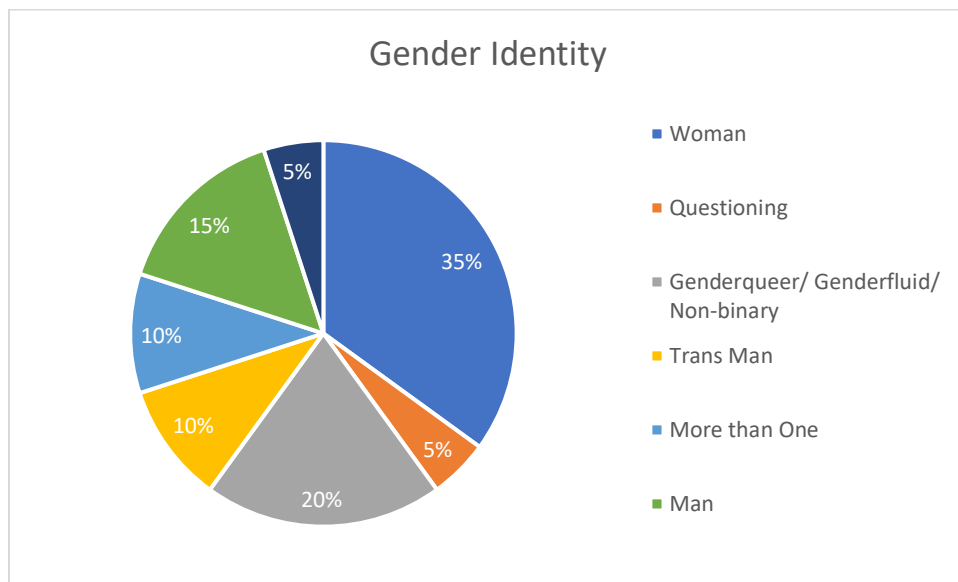


Figure 4. Gender Identity Breakdown

PROCEDURE

Participants learned about this study through campus updates, which were daily university newsletters, social media posts, and flyers posted by the LGBTQ+ resource center and the Office of Multicultural Affairs at Bowling Green State University. The participants confirmed their eligibility and scheduled an interview appointment through exchanging emails with the primary investigator. Each participant sat down for an hour to an-hour-and-30-minute conversational interview. Upon arrival at the appointment, participants were given an informed consent form. After obtaining their consent, the primary investigator started the voice recorder and began the interview. As the interview concluded, the primary investigator debriefed and provided psychological assistance resources. Lastly, the participants were asked to put their desired initials or pseudonyms on a list to indicate their reception of one \$15 Amazon gift card. Then, they were issued the gift card.

INTERVIEWS

We used in-depth interviews to obtain data. Each interview involved six main questions with about four sub-questions each. The first question “With what identities do you associate yourself?” helped us learn about the participants salient/ important identities. Then, the interviewer conversed with each participant to decide on which two most important identities the participant wanted to focus on during the interview. Each interview consisted six main questions with about four sub-questions each. The questions were about salient/ important identities, the four CTI frames, potential identity gaps between the mentioned identities, and strategies used to reconcile these gaps. The subsequent questions corresponded with the four frames in the Communication of Identity theory. An example of an interview question is “To what degree do

you see a conflict between your expressions of identity A and your expressions of identity B?”. Another example is “How have you attempted to resolve this conflict? Please tell me a situation in which you attempted to resolve this conflict.” Each of these questions consisted of sub questions about the extent to which two identities came in conflict, the effects of identity conflict, the participants’ feelings about the conflict, and the attempts that they had made to reconcile the conflict.

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

We analyzed the findings using inductive thematic analysis. This method utilizes little or no predetermined framework. The structure of analysis was derived from the findings themselves. First, the primary investigator employed an open coding procedure, taking into consideration of concepts including as salient identities, identity gaps, and identity negotiation in order to perform initial coding for each transcript. Then, initial coding notes for each transcript were incorporated with raw notes for each interview, which allowed us to identify possible themes. These themes were transferred into a code book. Examples for each theme were extracted quotes from the transcripts. The themes were identity gaps, ignoring the conflict, identity compartmentalization, identity prioritization, identity concealment, absolution of conflict, identity disclosure, conflict normalization, self-advocacy, internal resolution, a lack of identity gap, and identity affirmation/ exploration. Next, examining the code book enabled to draw relationships between themes, which contributed to the establishment of our conceptual model. Accordingly, the primary investigator designed the conceptual model and received feedback from the advisor. Finally, the primary investigator and the advisor together decided

which quotes or examples in the code book best illustrated the themes and sub-themes and use these findings to write the report.

FINDINGS

Conceptual Model

From the interview findings, we have established a conceptual model that aids visualization and comprehension of identity gaps (or a lack thereof) and identity negotiation pathways.

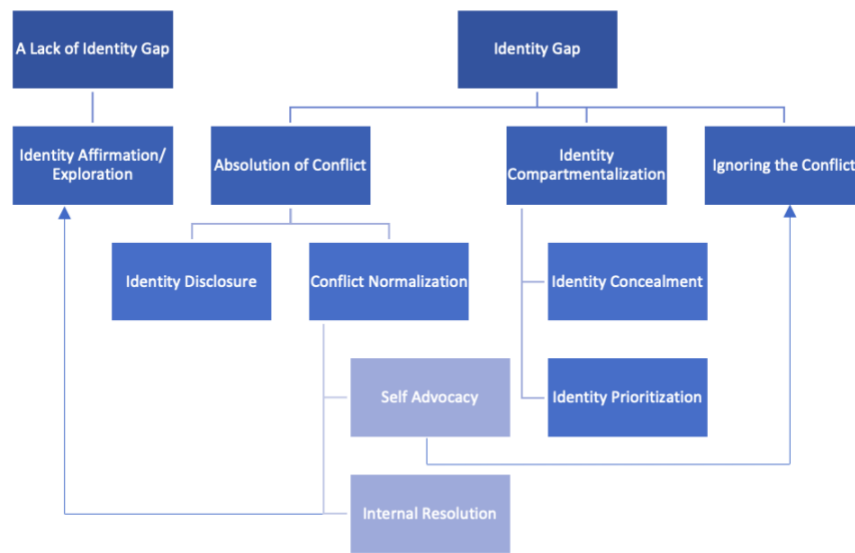


Figure 5 . Conceptual Model of Identity Negotiation Pathways

Identity Gaps

Identity gaps are defined as the dimensions in which two identities of an individual conflict. These dimensions may occur between the same layer of both identities or between multiple different layers of two identities.

An identity gap between the same layer of two identities can involve any of the four identity frames of the Communication Theory of Identity (CTI) including the personal frame, the enacted frame, the relational, and the communal frame. An example of an identity gap with the personal frame is when a participant points to the conflict between being genderfluid and being African American, stating “it's definitely a hard thing as what I'm feeling very masculine, and the idea of black men being more dangerous... sometimes that does get reflected upon me as well”. Additionally, as a participant whose salient identities are being of plus size and being gender non-binary explains that celebrating their plus-sized body clashes with how they want to present themselves as non-binary because female plus-sized bodies in the U.S. are considered feminine, their experience exemplifies an identity gap with the enacted frame. In regards to an identity gap of the relational frame, a participant whose salient identities are bisexual and Catholic reminisces about their past romantic relationship being terminated due to the conflict between their two identities, confessing that “the two identities in conflict really made the relationship unstable because there was that pressure from a church authority and from parents to not be bi”. In addition, an example of an identity gap of the communal frame is evident in an experience of a Republican gay participant with “a source of alienation” from the gay community as he claims that “[the majority of the gay community] tend to ostracize anyone in contact with right wingers and right wing gays” and “... this predetermined belief that if you are gay you must be a left winger, that is a requirement”.

While identity gaps between two salient identities occur within a single frame, they also occur within a diverse combination of multiple frames simultaneously. In many identity gaps found in the sample, any frame of CTI can interact with one or more frames. According to a participant whose salient identities are cisgender woman and queer, she finds herself struggling with her role in a queer romantic relationship as she has always been socialized into heterosexual female gender norms (e.g., having her meal paid for by a gentleman on a date, being emotionally submissive in a relationship, not being the primary provider). Since “there's not like that mold [for a non-heterosexual relationship], like doesn't apply”, she does not know what her role entails

in a queer romantic relationship. Her experience is an example of an identity gap involving the personal frame, the enacted frame, and the relational frame. Another example is evident in the experience of a person identifying as Native American and bisexual. As she realizes that there is no LGBTQ+ people being out or creating their own sub-community in her tribal community, she confesses “I definitely feel like I don't have as much of a space within [her tribal community] to fully express myself like I would in the LGBTQ+ community”. Her experience denotes an identity gap involving the personal frame, the enacted layer, and the communal layer.

Outcomes of Identity Gaps – *Identity Negotiation*

As one recognizes a certain identity gap, the person will respond to it by choosing one of the following three decisions: identity compartmentalization; absolution of conflict; ignoring the conflict.

Identity Compartmentalization

‘Identity Compartmentalization’ refers to the separation of two salient identities in attempt to prevent the identity gap. This method allows one to participate in a particular context with only one identity, limiting cognitive dissonance as well as mental discomfort and emotional anxiety (Crisp, 2011). As one engages in identity compartmentalization, the individual will engage in either identity concealment or identity prioritization.

Identity Concealment

‘Identity Concealment’ is defined as the decision to ‘closet’ or hide one or both salient identities. This strategy is employed selectively, depending on certain contexts that render an identity gap prominent and demand an individual’s immediate response. The current findings suggest that there are four common contexts in which identity concealment is committed, including family, community, friends, and personal distress.

Family can be an environment where the best solution to an identity gap is hiding one of the two identities. A participant whose salient identities are Black Latina and bisexual reveals

that, in front of her family, she cannot dress in an androgynous manner, display LGBTQ+ paraphernalia, express her masculine side, and attend 'Pride' month events because her family "sort of view it as really weird".

Community is another environment where closeting one's identity is thought to resolve an identity gap. One participant whose salient identities are biromantic (being romantically attracted to people of both male and female genders) and asexual (experiencing no sexual attraction to anybody), in queer settings, reveals that "I'm bi and kind of leave a sexual part out" due to her fear of potential judgment from other LGBTQ+ people. She explains that, while the gay culture (umbrella term for queer culture) is rich with representation and gay icons, "[her asexual identity] doesn't really have like a specific like a culture". Additionally, she admits to exclude the "romantic" part of her biromantic identity and just claims to be "bi" in queer environments because LGBTQ+ people associate "bi" with bisexual and are more familiar with the latter term and there is very little awareness of biromanticism.

Also, friendship is a factor that prompts one to conceal one of their two salient identities. One participant whose salient identities are Catholic and queer confesses that she hid her queer identity from some of her LGBTQ+ friends because these friends may not understand how her identities could coexist, expressing that "I was afraid that if I would talk to my queer friends about it, about me being queer, then they would want to know like, how does that work with you being Catholic? versus if I talked to my Catholic friends".

Lastly, personal distress can factor in an individual's decision to render one of their salient identities hidden. Z, a participant whose salient identities are agender and an artist, chooses to not reveal Z's gender identity and has to deal with people misgendering Z on a daily basis, sharing that "it's easier to pretend [being misgendered daily]'s not happening and to swallow that particular aspect... [disclosing their gender identity] would just be confusing and complicated and get a lot of people very irritated". Additionally, Z states that "I don't like addressing it and I don't like confronting the tension. When the tension happens, I'll just get very agitated" and Z would exit from the situation or smoke to cope with the stress. As a result, Z

associates disclosing their gender identity to some people a potential source of tension, which must be avoided.

Identity Prioritization

While some participants report using identity concealment, others report utilizing identity prioritization. This strategy encompasses an attempt to select one of two salient identities that leads one's self-concept in a particular context. This selection stems from the idea that, as two identities are incongruous in a setting, whichever identity that best suits that setting should become the focus of one's identification and self-presentation. Many factors that influence one's decision to prioritize one identity over another are friendships, community, romantic relationships, and personal distress.

Friendships can play an important role in identity prioritization as relationships between friends foster close connection and offer individuals emotional support. An example of this notion is evident in the experience of a participant whose salient identities are a sports enthusiast and gay. Because he cannot talk about his queer interests with his friends who are interested in sports and cannot talk about his sports interests with his gay friends, he reports that "I can't be both in the same spot. I've kind of got to be apart to be what I truly am". Accordingly, he shares that, while he discusses baseball games with his sports groups or friends who are also sports enthusiasts, he would go into length about his "boy issue" or gay relationship problems with his gay friends.

Somewhat similar to friendships, since community bestows upon one a sense of belonging to a group and provides the person self-validation all based on an identity, it can affect the person's decision to focus on a single identity. The experience of a participant whose two of their salient identities are Buddhist and atheist with identity prioritization illustrates the above notion. He discloses:

... like a lot of online atheist communities where Buddhism is disparaged just like any other religion and so that I feel this pressure to not be Buddhist. Like I'm not a real atheist

[as he is] also Buddhist, whereas I don't feel that from like the Buddhist community... it can be really hard to be there [the atheist community]... cuz it often seems like you can be one or the other. Like you have to check one identity at the door and is often trying to figure out like which one to express because [it is] only one at a time.

His confession reveals that the atheist community makes him feel obligated to be either atheist or Buddhist.

Additionally, romantic relationships are another contextual factor that determines identity prioritization. A participant's decision to break up with a same-sex partner serves to demonstrate this notion. The participant whose salient identities are bisexual and Catholic expresses that, throughout her relationship with her former partner, she was in a Catholic high school and lived with her parents. Her former partner continuously encouraged her to come out to her parents. The stress of being discreet about her relationship accompanied by her ex partner's insistence caused her to terminate the relationship because her parents were extremely Catholic and conservative, and she was dependent on them.

Lastly, personal distress also prompts an individual to bring an identity to the forefront of their self-concept. One participant whose salient identities are of plus size and non-binary states that "even though I recognize or identify with both, I don't think I can like confidently be like I'm both of these things simultaneously because they're so combative of one another". They further elaborate on how they attempt identity prioritization:

I feel like I just kind of focused on embracing the non-binary aspect of me and just kind of try my best to ignore the plus size of me... but that's kind of where I need to be right now.

Since they mention that the conflict between their identities exacerbates their gender dysphoria and heightens their distress and anxiety, prioritizing their non-binary identity over their plus size identity is "doing what [they] can to feel more comfortable as a non-binary person".

Absolution of Conflict

While identity compartmentalization prevents an identity gap, absolution of conflict resolves an identity gap. It is clear that an individual does not have any control over others' perceptions of a conflict between two identities in respect to one or multiple identity layers. Often, others' perceptions of how two identities can come in conflict intentionally or unintentionally can cause a person to internalize these perceptions. Consequentially, one comes to think that their two salient identities are conflicting. The realization of an identity gap prompts them to attempt to absolve the gap. The findings show that absolution of conflict is manifested in two ways including identity disclosure and conflict normalization.

Identity Disclosure

This tactic indicates one's decision to reveal a salient identity or both identities or 'come out' to people in particular settings where the conflict between two identities can arise. The findings suggest that identity disclosure often occurs in the context of close relationships such as a friendship or romantic relationship. For example, having felt like that she was "being in the closet" about her asexual identity and her biromantic identity in her past relationship, a participant shares her intention to reveal both identities in a romantic relationship in the future:

If we were to be like, Oh, it's like boyfriend and girlfriend, then I'd be like, wait, I need to tell you something before we do that. So I would probably attempt to [disclose both identities] because the thing with my ex-boyfriend and not letting him know about either of my crude entities was almost exhausting.

Another example is the experience of a participant who identifies as genderfluid and African American with disclosing their genderfluid identity to their African American friend. This participant, J, claims that their friend expressed confusion when learning that J had been invited to a "boys night out" by some male African American friends. J shares their response to their friend's reaction, claiming that "... I was talking to her about it and I was like, whoa, I'm genderfluid. So sometimes I... I feel more masculine than feminine some days". The above

attempts illustrate identity disclosure as a strategy to be used for absolving for a conflict between two identities.

Conflict Normalization

This tactic refers to actions that one take to resolve the conflict between their two identities in their own perceptions or others' perceptions. Normalizing identity conflicts is divided into two specialized tactics including self-advocacy and internal resolution.

Self-advocacy

This tactic describes a range of actions that one takes to persuade others about the lack of conflict between the person's two identities. In many contexts, as people perceive two certain identities to come in conflict, a person who has those identities is prompted to realize that the identities can be conflicting. As such, self-advocacy is sought. This tactic is often employed when a person is in close relationships with other people. For example, a participant whose salient identities are Buddhist and atheist stresses that his friends often forget his Buddhist identity and only remember his atheist identity. He shares his experience with self-advocacy:

I feel like if they knew more about Buddhism, then they would like see less of a conflict between my atheism and my Buddhism. Like, I'll pick [an article] that would require me to like explain some part of Buddhism with them to provide that education. Like the last article I did was about the Dalai Lama deciding reincarnate again and explain like why that's a big deal.

Another participant who identifies as genderfluid and African American reveals a variety of self-advocacy-related ways that they have implemented:

I've tried having like conversations about them. I like bringing up fun facts about different things about like African American people in the LGBTQ plus community. I talked to them about like, oh, there's, there's going to be a rally downtown in Cleveland. You want to go? You want to go to it? And more than likely, they're like, Oh, yeah, sure. And when we're there, I'm usually like, meeting up with other people. I see other African American people there too. And just exposing them to more African American people that are in the LGBTQ+ community has been my way of slowly nudging them like yes, this is a thing.

The above examples illustrate that self-advocacy can be one's attempt to resolve an identity gap.

Please refer to the description of 'Ignoring the Conflict' for explanation of how self-advocacy can lead to ignoring the conflict.

Internal Resolution

This strategy is a type of conflict normalization that enables a person to attempt to resolve an identity gap in their own perceptions. The majority of the findings suggest that internal resolution is most likely to be employed when an identity gap involves the personal frame. For example, a participant who identifies as a trans man and Buddhist shares that his two identities conflict in his perceptions because Buddhist teachings insist a follower on not being dependent on external things, and, as a trans man, he has to rely on testosterone shots every month to maintain his masculine look and to feel like a man. This participant also expresses how he has attempted to resolve this conflict in his own perceptions:

it's like sometimes I [am in] peace with that because I think of it like well, not the social sites but like my medication is like, well, people need insulin. People need heart medication, are we really saying like, there we can have spiritual sons

because they need these medications for physical thing or like, or like drugs for mental things like schizophrenia or severe depression.

Internal resolution is also exemplified by the experience of a participant who identifies as Native American and bisexual with working through an identity gap in her perceptions. She shares that she realizes the identity gap through being aware of the lack of visibility or outness of any queer individuals in her tribal community. Then, she expresses how she tackles the conflict between her identities:

resolving the conflict is really more just knowing that everyone I know, in my community, is very accepting. And I can feel very safe with them and I can express my identity fully with them. And through the I guess, because within my smaller community of just family, being able to express myself that way, will hopefully, you know, spread it throughout the community.

Through these personal accounts, it is clear that internal resolution is an attempt to settle identity gaps.

Please refer to the description of 'Identity Affirmation/ Exploration' to understand how internal resolution can lead to identity affirmation/ exploration.

Ignoring the Conflict

Ignoring the conflict between two identities is also one of the alternative outcomes of identity gaps. The findings suggest that this outcome often occurs due to two factors. The first factor is the fear of negative consequences following an attempt to resolve an identity gap. A participant who identifies as Catholic and bisexual confesses that she did not resolve the identity gap between her two identities that involved her Catholic communities because of fear. She elaborates:

I never tried to resolve the conflict. At least in the ways that [their former dating partner] wanted. I never came out to my parents ultimately. And, like ultimately, I didn't try to

push it with within like the boundaries of the school just because I feared what would happen if I tried to change anything.

Also, she adds that ignoring the conflict was “easier than being openly rejected”. Apparently, fear of a possible consequence motivates her to ignorance the identity gap. Another factor is personal distress. Z, a participant who identifies as agender and an artist, shares Z’s experience with ignoring the gap between two identities:

I don't like thinking about it. I don't like addressing it and I don't like confronting the tension. When the tension happens, I'll just get very agitated.... the shame [from being misgendered as a woman artist in Z’s art class lecture] will be lingering for a while. So I just tried to distract myself with whatever is most convenient and save it to a moment where there is a safe opportunity, preferably with a therapist to break it down and address it.

Z’s account illustrates that distress can make the thought of facing an identity conflict intolerable, which virtually makes ignoring the conflict ideal.

As mentioned above, self-advocacy can result in ignorance of conflict. When one unsuccessfully persuades others to realize that the gap between two identities should not exist, they choose to neglect the gap. In this situation, ignoring the gap seems to be most ideal because it helps buffer frustration from the existence of identity conflict. A participant who identifies as queer and a trans man talks about his response following an unsuccessful self-advocacy attempt:

if they're like not budging or anything, I would usually just walk away because I wouldn't want to deal with that negativity or sometimes I would just be like, trying to explain but if they still don't get it, I just drop the subject and probably talk about something else. Because if they're not gonna listen or try to understand your point then [why] talk to them?

It is apparent that, since the conflict between their identities remains for other people, he decides to ignore the conflict. That self-advocacy can lead to ignorance of conflict is also evident in the

experience of a participant who identifies as genderfluid and African American. The person shares:

I have attempted, but since then I have given up because I have explained to them and every way I can, I have shown them I have presented it in many different cases. And yet people just don't want to open their eyes for it. So I gave up.

Again, an unsuccessful attempt to persuade others about the possible lack of identity gap is followed by choosing to ignore the conflict between two identities in the perceptions of others.

A Lack of Identity Gap

A lack of identity gap underlines the harmony or a lack conflict between two identities in terms of one or more identity frames. Similar to identity gaps, a lack of identity gap can exist between two salient identities in relation with a single layer or multiple layers simultaneously.

As a lack of identity gap is evident between two salient identities in respect to a single layer, the layer can be any of the four identity frames. For example, a participant who identifies as Wiccan and genderfluid/ non-binary provides an account of a situation where their two identities are harmonious in terms of the personal frame:

there isn't [a conflict] because Wicca is very big on the whole idea of everything is fluid there is no really clear line between the male and female because there are two sides of the same coin. There is the female aspect which is the goddess and then there's the male aspect which is the God. So it would make perfect sense that there is space in between.

And that would be where I am...

Their perceptions of their Wiccan identity complement with those of their genderfluid identity, which illustrates a lack of identity gap. Another example is the experience of a participant whose

two identities can co-exist without friction in regard to the communal frame. The person who identifies as gender non-binary and of plus size shares:

I don't think there's a conflict when I'm talking about non-binary spaces for communities. To be honest, a lot of the trans masculine and non-binary people I've met are also plus size... I like I don't think my plus size body makes me feel like I'm less in the community because people because the people in the community seem to not give a sh*t about me being plus-sized.

The fact that the plus-size identity is accepted and common in many gender non-binary communities contributes to a lack of identity gap between being of plus size and being gender-nonbinary.

While a lack of identity conflict exists in a single layer, it can emerge from a diverse combination of layers. For instance, a participant who identifies as pansexual and German claims that there is no conflict between their identities in terms of the personal frame and the communal frame. He asserts that his perceptions of his pansexual identity are in no way discordant with those of his German identity because one identity is his sexuality and the other is about his cultural background and ethnicity. He further specifies that he doesn't perceive the identities to clash because "there's other people like [him], that are pan and they have a high heavy German heritage background". As such, acknowledging that other people in the pansexual community and the German community share both of his identities helps him understand a lack of identity gap in terms of the personal frame and the communal frame. Also, a lack of identity gap is exemplified in the coming out experiences of a participant who identifies as Native American and bisexual. That understanding and acceptance coming from her boyfriend follow her disclosure of the stated identities allows her to realize that there is no gap between her identities in terms of the relational frame and the personal frame. She confesses:

Telling him I'm bisexual was just kind of like he took a he obviously took it very well because he was like, "Oh, I am too" and share feelings for understand each other for as well as but also I think I think he just helped me grow more. And then with my native

American identity, telling him about that. He was just interested, not afraid of me, my family because of me, he got to know me more both. In both situations, he got to know me more. And he still wants me.

Her positive coming out experiences enable her to realize a lack of conflict between her identities in her romantic relationship and her perceptions.

Outcome of a Lack of Identity Gap

Identity Affirmation/ Exploration

This outcome reflects that because of a lack of an identity gap, an individual is enabled to feel validated about their identities and explore these identities in great depth. The findings imply that, if there is no identity gap, a person will experience identity affirmation/ exploration. This notion can be illustrated by a participant's feeling of affirmation about both of his identities. He shares:

Because I'm an atheist, I can be a better Buddhist because when people make these claims to me, I know that I believe the ones I believe because I think they are true. Like I'm convinced of it. And they're less like shakable.

The participant highlights the fact that the lack of identity gap solidifies both of his identities. This solidification alludes to identity affirmation/ exploration. Another participant offers further insights into how a lack of an identity gap helps one not have to resort to identity concealment because of a sense of security. As her identities as being a woman and being queer are embraced and well supported by her close friends, she admits:

I feel like [the lack of identity gap] has given me so much, I don't know if I would really call it pride but just like so much like so much of like a sense of peace that like there are people who accept me and all the agenda that I hold and are interested in them. Like as they are and that like I don't have to modulate or hide certain parts or anything with this group of people...

The lack of an identity gap between her identities in respect to the relational frame helps her be more authentic and express both identities. Another participant who also identifies as queer and a woman shares a similar experience of identity affirmation/ exploration. Since she knows that queer women are given more freedom to express their queerness, while queer men are more likely to be socially criticized to do so, she claims:

I think I'm more willing to express or able to express the fact that I am queer. Like I can put that on social media, I can talk about it to people and know that if someone doesn't like it, they'll just say they don't like it. And then I can just, you know, move on from both in my life and I don't have to focus too much on it.

Apparently, a lack of an identity gap has given her the opportunity to be more vocal and 'out' about her queer identity without negative ramifications. As a result, the lack of an identity gap can lead to identity affirmation/ exploration.

As mentioned in the 'Internal Resolution' section, internal resolution as a conflict normalization strategy can lead to successfully resolving an identity conflict in one's perceptions. Such a success, then, can result in identity affirmation/ exploration. The findings suggest that there are two different kinds of internal resolution that mutually lead to identity affirmation/ exploration. One is internal resolution exclusively by oneself. The other is internal resolution inspired by other people. An example for the former is evident in the account by a participant who identifies as genderfluid and African-American. They admit:

... The phrase, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, is definitely where I pull from these different conflicts that happen between my different identities and who I am. I just take them and I go. "I'm perfect the way I am". And I like that about myself. And I keep going. And even though sometimes it may hurt, I try to put a band-aid on it and keep moving.

The participant resolves the conflict between their two identities within themselves and feels affirmed about their identities. Their account reveals that their process of internal resolution is conducted solely by themselves. In addition, the experiences of a participant who identifies as

Catholic and queer serve as an example for internal resolution inspired by other people. The participant reveals how she, with help from a friend, came to accept that both of her identities could coexist as she expresses:

I'm talking with my friend that I mentioned, like once I was finally talking with her, she shared about how she until she finally came to grips with her identity. She wasn't able to fully understand God's love because she was hiding the way that she loved and like. So she kind of taught that to me and working through that. I came to realize that as well that like, I'm never going to be able to even just like platonically like fully love, God really fully love like the people around me if I'm like, thinking that the way that I am is like if there is a conflict. Like that's broken so, um, it's allowed me to just like, love more freely and be more confident and just like sharing my beliefs are sharing who I am.

The example of her friend successfully reconciling the conflict between a queer identity and the Catholic identity empowers her to reconcile her own identity conflict. This reconciliation has allowed her to explore both of her identities in greater depth.

IMPLICATIONS

While literature puts a strong emphasis on personal-relational identity gaps, our findings suggest that a wide range of identity gaps are worth attention as well. Two salient identities can conflict in terms of a single frame or multiple frames as demonstrated in the findings section. While we understand that personal-relational identity gaps are most studied because of their various implications (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jung et al., 2007; Hecht & Faulkner, 2000), other identity gaps have various bearings on identity enactments and identity management. Our findings demonstrate that different kinds of identity gap are related to varying outcomes of identity negotiation including ignoring the conflict, identity compartmentalization, or absolution of conflict. We speculate that some identity gaps make certain outcomes more feasible than

others. Although we did not focus on systematically observing whether particular kinds of identity gap are more likely to be related to particular identity negotiation strategies or not, we encourage future studies to do so.

We found that there were many pathways of identity negotiation. First, there are main pathways including ignoring the conflict, identity compartmentalization, and absolution of conflict. The findings revealed that identity compartmentalization and absolution of conflict are complex mechanisms of identity management. Second, certain pathways may intersect. Evidently, self-advocacy, which belongs to absolution of conflict, can lead to ignoring of conflict. Additionally, successful internal resolution, which also belongs to absolution of conflict, can lead to identity affirmation/ exploration. Third, an individual can choose one pathway of identity negotiation for a certain identity gap, the person can choose another for a different identity gap. We suggest that these varying ways of negotiating identities result in the individuals' unique experiences of their own identities.

As one engages in identity compartmentalization for a certain identity gap, the person either practices identity concealment or identity prioritization. As our findings suggest that participants' decisions to conceal certain salient identities depended on many contextual factors, we agree with similar findings found in past literature (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). In addition, we learned that some of our participants concealed certain salient identities and passed with more socially accepted identities in order to prevent negative reactions, which is congruent with previous research's findings (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). What we found about identity prioritization supports past literature (Faulkner & Hecht, 2011). Focusing on parts of a certain identity (e.g., trans man or Hispanic) makes it easier for one to increase a sense of belonging to a community and develop their self-concept, compared to focusing on all parts of the identity. As

literature suggests that identity compartmentalization helps reduce the negative ramifications of cognitive dissonance due to identity gaps (Crisp, 2011), future research should investigate this identity negotiation strategy further. We believe that compartmentalizing identities has significant implications for the LGBTQ+ population because many components in different social contexts such as inclusivity, levels of understanding of identities, or prejudice can prompt a person to engage in either identity concealment or identity prioritization in order to manage their identities. Since literature lacks much evidence on identity compartmentalization, we recommend investigating this strategy's other possible tactics besides identity concealment and identity prioritization.

Absolution of conflict is also another notable identity negotiation strategy. It involves identity disclosure and normalization of conflict. The latter is comprised of self-advocacy and internal resolution. We found that self-advocacy helped our participants authentically communicate their salient identities with other individuals who may perceive the identities to be incongruent. Additionally, internal resolution assisted the participants with resolving the identity conflict in their own perceptions. Our findings align with previous evidence in literature about identity negotiation's interpersonal and intrapersonal implications (Swann & Bosson, 2008). Also, as Swann and Bosson (2008) claimed that forces of identity negotiation persisted even after self-presentational activities, what we found about internal resolution confirms this finding because self-advocacy often takes place during self-presentational activities and internal resolution often takes place during a person's alone time or when they self-reflect.

Similar to identity gaps, a lack of identity gap has a wide variety. It can be of either a single frame or multiple frames. As most of our participants experienced identity affirmation/exploration as a result of a lack of identity gap. It is understandable that, while identity gaps lead

to various complex outcomes of identity negotiation, a lack of identity gap directly leads to one positive outcome. The linear path from a lack of identity gap to identity affirmation/ exploration emphasizes the importance of the congruency between two salient identities. For some participants, this congruency solely depends on their own perceptions of the relationship between their two salient identities. For others, the congruency depends on other individuals and communities' perceptions. This notion implies that, if we can promote a lack of identity gap on an individual level and an interpersonal level, people are more likely to be able to feel affirmed about and explore their salient identities.

Furthermore, the above implications have clinical significance. While having LGBTQ+ identities makes identity development difficult for LGBTQ+ individuals, having intersectional identities even makes it more difficult. Since previous research has suggested that identity gaps expose individuals to negative outcomes such as alienation, depression, communication dissatisfaction, changing enactments of identities, or changing self-labeling (Hecht & Faulkner, 2000; Jung et al., 2007; Faulkner & Hecht, 2011), clinicians, social workers, community intervention specialists, and community advocates should inform their practices with the implications discussed above.

LIMITATIONS

We encountered a number of challenges in the research process. Future researchers should pay close attention to the following limitations in order to adequately replicate this study. First, our sample lacked racial/ ethnic diversity. Given the intersectionality theory, we anticipate more nuances to the results of a research study with a racially/ ethnically diverse sample as racial/ ethnic identities can be considered individuals' salient identities and introduce interesting

identity gaps and ways of identity management. Time constraint was another limitation. The primary investigator had two weeks to conduct 20 in-depth interviews that each lasted about one hour to one hour and a half. Data analysis was performed in three weeks. If more time had been given, we could potentially observe the findings in greater depth. Third, the interpretation of findings may have been subject to the primary investigator's bias. As the primary investigator was the main coder, we think that his bias could factor in many steps in the data analysis process. Therefore, we recommend having a team of at least four people participate in data analysis. Fourth, some participants' modest understanding and exploration of their salient identities made interviewing difficult. A few participants claimed that, although they could identify what identities were salient to them, it was challenging for them to talk about those identities or answer questions about identity conflicts. As such, we suggest that future research attempt to tackle this limitation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I, Viet (Mason) Trinh, the primary investigator, would like to express my gratitude toward both of my research advisors, Dr. Eric Dubow and Dr. Sandra Faulkner. For this project, Dr. Eric Dubow advised the quantitative section and Dr. Sandra Faulkner advised the qualitative section. Not only both of them provided me with valuable advice and guidance, but they also gave me immense motivation to complete this two-parted project. I greatly thank them for the research skills that I have been able to attain over the past year.

Secondly, I am grateful for the grants provided by the Department of Psychology, Center of Undergraduate Research and Scholarships (CURS), and the Honors College at BGSU. The grants were used for providing compensation to participants of both studies. The funding undoubtedly was integral to the completion of this project.

Thirdly, I would like to express my appreciation toward student organizations and diversity affairs offices at many universities that I reached out to in order to recruit participants. Without their endorsements, recruitment would have been tremendously challenging.

Lastly, I would like to thank my mother, Phuong Le. She lent me immense strength when I was frustrated during some stages of the project.

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