

MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY AND UNDERGRADUATE DIVERSITY  
WORKSHOP FACILITATORS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

College and university student populations are more structurally diverse than they have ever been, yet students from historically marginalized identity groups are routinely subjected to discrimination, racism, and other acts of intolerance on campus. Many colleges and universities in the United States now offer or require courses, workshops, or intergroup dialogues aimed at improving campus climate by fostering interactions among students from different social groups. Previous literature on diversity education has explored the challenges that instructors encounter as they teach students about diversity topics, but little research has examined the experiences of undergraduates who take on this work. This qualitative study used multiple dimensions of identity theory as a framework for exploring the experiences of 13 undergraduates who facilitated diversity workshops for first-year students during the spring semester of 2017. The study's findings indicate that facilitating diversity workshops introduced facilitators to language and concepts that allowed them to process their identities in new ways, taught them to be more aware of their own biases and assumptions, and encouraged them to confront racist, sexist, or homophobic language outside of the workshops. The study's findings also reveal the implications of tasking undergraduates with the difficult work of teaching diversity to other students as they simultaneously undergo their own critical development. The study highlights the interconnected, dynamic, and contextual nature of social identities, supports existing research on college student identity development, and adds to the body of literature on diversity education by including the voices and experiences of undergraduate instructors.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although structural diversity on college and university campuses has increased, unwelcoming campus climates and acts of intolerance and discrimination continue to negatively affect students from historically marginalized social groups (Rogers, Cartwright, & Skinner, 2016). In a recent study at a large Midwestern university, for example, students of color reported being stereotyped or experiencing microaggressions, and some felt that their academic achievements were not taken seriously because of their race (Harwood, Choi, Orozco, Browne Huntt, & Mendenhall, 2015). These incidents are not specific to the university in this one study; students from historically marginalized groups across the U.S. have reported feeling isolated or have experienced overt racism on campus (Harper, 2013). In addition to racial tensions on college campuses, a national study examining campus climate for LGBTQ students revealed that students routinely encounter homophobic attitudes and discrimination from peers (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). These reports are troubling given that campus climate can affect the quality of students' college experiences (Astin 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006).

Diversity on campus can be academically and socially beneficial to students and has the potential to improve students' capacity for intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006). Having a student population comprised of students who identify across cultures, races, religions, sexual orientations, gender identities, socioeconomic status, ability status, and political views may result in increased cognitive and moral reasoning ability and decreased biases and prejudices (Mayhew, Rockenbach, Bowman, Seifert, Wolniak, Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2016). Exposure to different others alone, however, may not be enough to achieve these benefits; instead, students must have meaningful interactions with others (Deardorff, 2006; Lee, Poch, Shaw, & Williams, 2012;

Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006). Even on a structurally diverse campus, however, students may not necessarily interact with students from different backgrounds. Instead, they may attend classes and become friends with students whose experiences and backgrounds resemble their own, thus limiting their exposure to and interaction with diversity (Deardorff, 2006; Humphreys, 2000).

An increasing number of colleges and universities attempt to encourage interaction among students through courses, workshops, or dialogue groups centered on topics of diversity (Humphreys, 2000; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999). The content of diversity courses and workshops can vary depending on a number of factors, including the mission and values of the institution, the geographic region in which the institution is located, and the instructor who leads the course (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999). Despite these variations in the content of diversity courses, literature on diversity education suggests diversity courses and workshops promote development of the intercultural skills required to navigate and participate in a pluralistic society.

Although measuring the results of diversity courses is somewhat problematic (more on this in Chapter 2), existing studies indicate that these courses may improve students' cognitive ability and the capacity to understand complex concepts (Gurin, 1999; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Hurtado, 2004; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen & Allen, 1999; Nelson Laird, 2005; Nelson Laird, Hurtado, & Engberg, 2005) and can improve students' capacity for moral reasoning (Adams & Zhou-McGovern, 1994; Parker, Barnhardt, Pascarella, & McCowen, 2016). Diversity courses may also increase students' awareness of systemic racism and social privilege (Case, 2007; Chang, 2000; Chang, 2002; Kernahan & Davis, 2007) and may increase students' understanding of equality, privilege, and dominant and majority cultures (Enger & Lajimodiere, 2011). Diversity courses may also reduce students' biases and prejudices (Probst, 2003; Tran,

Young, & Di Lella, 1994) and inspire students to become more civically engaged (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Martinez, 2014).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Colleges and universities approach teaching diversity in various ways. The model at the center of this study consists of undergraduate peer leaders who facilitate a mandatory diversity workshop for first-year students.<sup>1</sup> The undergraduate students are provided a script, and after introducing key concepts to students, facilitate dialogue among audience members, answer questions, and describe their own experiences on campus. Although the workshops are not designed as true intergroup dialogues, concerns regarding the students who facilitate the workshops are similar to those regarding intergroup dialogue facilitators. Quayle and Johnson (2016) note that intergroup dialogue facilitators “must understand their own social identities, wrestle with their authority and power as facilitators, and negotiate the extent to which they participate during these dialogues rather than remaining neutral or silent,” and in order to do so, “must be developmentally ready to have the knowledge and skills to facilitate these dialogues” (p. 30). Thus, the extent to which students who facilitate diversity discussions with their peers consider their own identities may enable them to deliver content that promotes positive interactions with diversity.

Further, because diversity material is often taught to students in their first year on campus, students may have never been exposed to the issues covered in the material. Students comprise a range of experiences with diversity, and a range of developmental readiness, which may influence their willingness to accept new ideas regarding diversity and inclusion (Park & Chang, 2015). Students’ first exposure to diversity on campus can set the tone for how they view

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the workshop program.

diversity during and after college, and therefore must be delivered with care. If students who facilitate conversations about diversity are not reflective of their own identities, they may not be able to enact that role well. Ineffective or inadequate discussions have the potential to result in negative interactions with diversity, which can reduce the potential benefits of diversity education and further heighten tensions on campus between groups of students (Roksa, Kilgo, Trolan, Pascarella, Blaich, & Wise, 2017).

While a peer-to-peer teaching model has the potential to be beneficial for both the students who are taught by their peers and the peers who teach (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), little research has been done on the experiences of undergraduates who teach their peers about diversity. This study intended to fill this gap in the literature by giving attention to how students who take on this work reflect and make sense of their own identities and how this reflection affects how they deliver diversity material to their peers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences of undergraduate students who facilitated diversity workshops for other students and the ways in which being a facilitator allowed them to reflect on and make sense of their own social identities. Instead of privileging a particular social identity group, the study was designed to allow participants to identify and describe the identities which are most salient to them, how these identities intersect or relate to one another, and how these identities may shift or change as they navigate facilitation of the diversity workshops.

## **Research Questions**

The two questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How do students' experiences facilitating diversity workshops inform how they make sense of their social identities?
2. How do students' multiple dimensions of identity shift as they navigate being both college students and diversity workshop facilitators?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework employed for this study is multiple dimensions of identity theory (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones, 1995; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Multiple dimensions of identity theory suggests that individuals simultaneously hold different identities that are socially constructed, dynamic and overlapping, and that identities become more or less salient depending on context (Jones & Abes, 2013).

The participants in this study facilitated workshops that focused on identity and the ways in which individuals' experiences are impacted by their social identities. Identity-based diversity courses and workshops have been shown to be effective at developing students' understanding and awareness of social inequalities and improving their ability to communicate across social groups (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013). As students who facilitate workshops about identity, they may question their own identity, or their salient identities may shift depending on their experiences facilitating the workshop. Using multiple dimensions of identity theory as a framework allowed insight into how students identify themselves and how they reflected on these identities through their experiences as facilitators. This framework also helped to articulate the awareness students developed regarding their identities as they facilitated diversity

workshops and how this awareness affected how they interacted with others, both in and out of the context of the workshops.

### **Significance of the Study**

Research on diversity courses indicates a number of challenges for instructors who teach diversity material (Ahlquist, 1994; Berlak, 1999; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2002). However, little research explores the experiences of undergraduate students who take on this work. This study adds to the body of literature on diversity education by adding the voices and experiences of undergraduate students and offering implications for further research in this area.

Although not intended to be a program evaluation, the results of the study are also beneficial to the administrators who oversee the diversity workshop described in this study. The feedback participants offered regarding their experiences with training, working with other facilitators, and the challenges they encountered may help administrators improve the workshop program, both for the facilitators and the students they teach.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Campus climate* is defined as “the cumulative attitudes, behaviors and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities and potential” (Rankin, 2005).

*Diversity* in the context of this study is defined as “the variety of ways we are different as human beings in terms of physical attributes, capabilities, cultural/social backgrounds, experiences, perspectives and ideas.”<sup>2</sup> This definition of diversity includes differences in race,

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<sup>2</sup> Landrum-Brown, J. (2005). University 101 Diversity Module [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from author’s personal files/communication.

ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, education, political views, religious beliefs, gender, sexual orientation, ability, age, and other variations among individuals.

*Diversity courses* are courses which “have content and methods of instruction that are inclusive of the diversity found in society” (Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005, p. 450).

*Identity* refers to a socially constructed sense of self that reflects “one’s personally held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation) and the ways one expresses that relationship” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 577).

*Intercultural competence* is a system of attitudes and behaviors that allow a person to interact with individuals from different cultures and experiences in appropriate ways. This competency requires acknowledgement that identity shapes perspective and a willingness to seek out and attempt to understand people from other backgrounds (Deardorff, 2006).

*Structural diversity* refers to the overall diversity of the student population. Hurtado and colleagues (1999) defined structural diversity as “the numerical representation of various racial, ethnic, and gender groups on campus” (p. 19).

## **Chapter Overview**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. In the next chapter, I discuss the literature relevant to understanding teaching diversity material to undergraduates, college student identity development, and multiple dimensions of identity theory. In Chapter 3, I describe the diversity program at the center of the study and outline the methods I used to recruit participants and to collect and analyze data. In Chapter 4, I provide profiles of each of the study’s 13 participants and present the study’s major findings. In Chapter 5, I discuss the study’s findings and their implications, describe the study’s limitations, offer suggestions for future research, and share a reflection of my experience conducting this research.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Before discussing a framework for understanding how the identities of the participants in this study were shaped by their experiences facilitating diversity workshops, it is first important to understand the reasons for and potential benefits of diversity education in colleges and universities. To this end, the first section in this chapter describes these reasons and benefits, as well as some of the challenges associated with teaching diversity material to students. The next section presents an overview of the study of college student identity development and multiple dimensions of identity theory. The research presented in these sections illuminates participants' experiences with diversity on campus, both in and out of the classroom, and offers a framework for understanding how teaching diversity can influence participants' understanding of their own identities.

### **Diversity in Higher Education**

College and university campuses are microcosms of larger society, and as the United States becomes more structurally diverse, the demographic composition of undergraduate students follows suit. As a result, college and university student populations are more diverse than they have ever been. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education projects dramatic shifts in the demographic make-up of college students in the coming years, resulting from increasing numbers of Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander high school graduates and decreasing numbers of White/Non-Hispanic and Black/Non-Hispanic high school graduates (Bransberger & Michelau, 2016). International students are attending colleges and universities in the U.S. now more than ever, mostly at the undergraduate level (Institute of International Education, 2017). In addition to becoming increasingly more racially and ethnically diverse,

college students are also becoming more socioeconomically diverse, with growing enrollment of first-generation students and more students receiving need-based financial aid (Wine, Bryan, & Siegel, 2014). Further, social shifts have allowed students who identify as gay, lesbian, and transgender to be more open and vocal about their gender and sexual identities (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010).

In order to accommodate students of various races, ethnicities, nationalities, sexual orientations, gender identities, and socioeconomic status, university administrators and stakeholders attempt to create welcoming campus environments through services and programs designed to address these students' particular needs (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Regardless of this accommodation, however, students of color and students from other historically marginalized groups have reported facing both explicit and implicit discrimination and being subjected to harassment and hostility on campus (Harper, 2013).

One of the reasons tensions among college students persist is that high schools in the United States are often segregated, or at least largely separated, by race and socioeconomic status (Deardorff, 2006; Humphreys, 2000; Park & Chang, 2015). Students may come to college having never been exposed to or having never interacted with individuals from backgrounds different from their own. As a result, students may bring with them preconceived notions and stereotypes, leading them to only interact with students whose backgrounds and experiences are familiar, further limiting their exposure to and interaction with diverse groups of students (Park & Chang, 2015). While lack of interaction alone does not create a hostile campus environment for students, lacking an awareness of the inequalities that exist for some students has the potential to exacerbate inhospitable campus climate conditions, which can negatively affect retention rates, academic performance, and overall college experience (Bowen, Chingos, &

McPherson, 2009). Regular, meaningful interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds and social identity groups, whether in the classroom or in social settings, can foster more positive campus environments by lessening students' previously held stereotypes and prejudices (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2006).

A structurally diverse student body does not guarantee that students will interact with students from different backgrounds, and without this interaction, achieving the potential benefits of diversity is difficult. In order to increase interaction among students from various backgrounds on campus to both prepare students to live and work in an increasingly global society and to create a welcoming learning environment for all students, many institutions of higher education have implemented programs intended to teach students to appreciate and engage with diversity.

### **Teaching Diversity to College Students**

A common method of encouraging students to interact with diversity and with peers from different backgrounds is through coursework. Diversity-themed courses can consist of a range of material and can be facilitated in a number of ways (Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). Institutions may offer a broad, introductory course intended to provide students with an overview of topics related to diversity, or they may incorporate issues of diversity into discipline-specific courses. Courses are typically created to teach students about discrimination, social inequality, and to help them understand the perspectives of individuals from different backgrounds, particularly those from historically marginalized groups (Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). These courses may be lecture or discussion based, and they may be offered online or in a classroom setting. Some are dialogue courses, intended to “provide a structured format in which students can learn how to engage positively” in cross-racial dialogue

(Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005, p. 27). Depending on the college or university, diversity courses may be referred to as a “diversity course,” a “multicultural course,” or a “social justice course.” The topics most often covered in these courses include xenophobia, racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia, social inequality, privilege, and systemic discrimination.

Diversity coursework can be incorporated into an institution’s curriculum for a number of reasons, and the reasons for implementing these initiatives can vary between institutions (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005). Institutions may include diversity education as part of their accreditation requirements, or the courses may be offered as part of an administrative response to incidents of racism on campuses or requests from students and faculty for more inclusive material in the classroom. Because diversity courses are created and implemented in different ways at different types of colleges and universities, not all diversity courses are created equal, and topics covered in diversity courses may vary depending on the institution. An introductory diversity course at an evangelical Christian college, for example, is less likely to include a section on equal treatment of individuals who identify as LGBTQ (and, perhaps, less likely to use language such as “individuals who identify as LGBTQ”) than a diversity course at a secular institution. Not all diversity courses are developed with the same theoretical perspectives or outcomes in mind, and not all are approached in the same way. Thus, diversity initiatives and the programs and courses associated with them may not be “equally beneficial to students,” and may even be “poorly conceived and misguided” (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005, p. 7).

Students often enroll in introductory diversity courses during their first year on campus, typically as a component of their institution’s general education requirements. As Bowman (2010) noted, “many incoming college students come from increasingly segregated public schools and neighborhoods” (p. 544), increasing the likelihood that they will have had little

previous interaction with students from backgrounds different from their own. If diversity courses are not approached with awareness of this fact, they may only reinforce students' incorrect notions about ethnicity, race, privilege, and social equality, which could set a tone for negative interactions with diversity throughout their college experience (Bowman, 2010; Nelson Laird, 2005).

Some institutions require students to complete a minimum number of courses that cover topics deemed "diverse" by the college or department (Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011). The topics covered in such courses may be broad, exploring a wide range of diversity within a given discipline, or more focused on a specific area of diversity. For example, literature courses that count toward a diversity requirement might require readings from authors of various national origins, ethnic or racial backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, or gender identities, or they may focus solely on a works written by authors of one particular identity group. Courses with a focus on diversity are most frequently offered in humanities disciplines (Nelson Laird & Engberg, 2011), but other disciplines may offer courses which fulfill the diversity requirement as well.

Although these courses may introduce students to new perspectives and encourage them to engage with diversity through their academic work, requiring students to meet a minimum number of earned credit hours does not guarantee that students will leave college able to articulate the experiences of other cultures, describe social injustices, or even understand the value of studying diversity. Moreover, because diversity courses are often electives, students may choose to study topics with which they are already familiar, thus reinforcing what they already value or believe, making diversity learning in new areas more difficult (Hurtado, Mayhew, & Engberg, 2012). Further, the number of credit hours required to meet the diversity

coursework component is often low; students may need only to complete one or two courses to meet the requirement.

### **Measuring the Benefits of Diversity Coursework**

Results of studies examining the outcomes of diversity courses have indicated a number of cognitive and social benefits for the students who attend them. Attending a diversity course may improve students' cognitive ability (Chang, 2002; Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Nelson Laird, 2005; Nelson Laird, Hurtado, & Engberg, 2005), and increase students' critical thinking skills (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002) and capacity for moral reasoning (Adams & Zhou-McGovern, 1994; Hurtado, 2004). As a result of attending diversity courses, students may also gain an appreciation for other cultures (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002) and develop an awareness and understanding of systemic social injustices (Case, 2007; Kernahan & Davis, 2007).

In addition to improving students' cognitive and reasoning ability, attending a diversity course may offer social benefits by lessening students' biases and prejudices. Tran, Young, and Di Lella (1994) found that students' notions of negative stereotypes were reduced as a result of taking a diversity course, and Probst (2003), in a study examining a diversity course in the workplace, suggested that "the course had a positive impact on the perceived equality of gender roles; improved student attitudes toward the disabled, racial minorities, and GLBs at work; and increased intercultural tolerance" (p. 236). Enger and Lajimodiere (2011) studied the effects of an online diversity course for graduate students and found that students gained significant understanding of equality, privilege, and dominant and minority cultures because of the course. Other studies have shown similar results, suggesting that exposure to topics such as racial and gender inequality can inspire students to be more comfortable with issues of difference or

privilege (Bowman, 2010), less likely to hold racist attitudes (Chang, 2002), and become more civically engaged (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Martinez, 2014).

While many studies have revealed the potential value of attending a diversity course, others have suggested that these results may be more complicated than they appear. Some have argued that students may benefit from attending a course on diversity regardless of how the instructor presents the material (Case, 2007; Chang, 2002; Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004), but Brown (2004) suggested otherwise, noting that the method of instruction may be more influential than the message being delivered. Further complicating the effects of diversity courses is the possibility that not all students may benefit from them equally as positive gains in cognitive ability are more difficult to determine in longitudinal studies (Bowman, 2009). The positive effects of diversity courses may be further complicated due to an accentuation effect, in which the diversity course reinforces students' preexisting notions of other races and ethnicities (Nelson Laird, Engberg, & Hurtado, 2005). Because students often attend colleges located within the same geographic area as their homes (Hillman & Weichman, 2016), they are likely to attend colleges with students with similar backgrounds and perspectives as their own, which may only work to reinforce existing notions regarding diversity.

Research on the benefits of diversity courses is promising, but it is also problematic, and a number of caveats must be considered when examining the positive outcomes of diversity courses. Much of the research on diversity courses has been quantitative, and most researchers measured the effects of diversity courses using surveys and instruments designed to record students' opinions and values before and after taking a course. The pre- and post-course surveys common throughout the literature on the effects of diversity courses have measured students' self-reported changes in values. Changes in students' values (as the students themselves have

reported them) do not reflect changes in behaviors, nor do they indicate long-term changes (Bowman, 2010). Further complicating the results of these studies is the fact that diversity courses do not appear to benefit all students equally (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Bowman, 2009; Bowman, 2010). Positive outcomes of diversity courses may depend on students' race, gender, or socioeconomic status; White students and those from middle-class and low-income families may gain the most cognitive benefits from attending diversity courses (Bowman, 2010).

### **Challenges of Teaching Diversity**

Teaching diversity material can present a number of challenges for both students and instructors. The word “diversity” itself can have a numbing effect for students and faculty alike; it may be so overused that students may see it as little more than a buzzword (Holmes, 2015). The term is also problematic in that it can suggest that there is a default “normal,” (usually the White, heterosexual, middle-class male) while everyone else falls into the category of “diverse,” which could then be thought of as “not normal.” Students outside of the “normal” may feel further marginalized in diversity courses if they feel that they are being singled out as the “other.” Unfortunately, students' concerns are sometimes justified when diversity course instructors call upon them to be the representative voice for an entire demographic (Martinez, 2014).

One of the most difficult aspects of leading diversity courses is facilitating meaningful class discussions. Although diversity courses are often intended as a means of encouraging students to talk openly with other students from different backgrounds (Bowman, 2010), discussion in diversity classes can be sharply limited due to several factors. Miscommunication among students (or among students and instructors) or resistance or refusal to participate in class

discussions or activities can result in conflicts instead of productive, engaged conversation. Such limited discussions among students in diversity courses can hinder diversity learning (Ahlquist, 1994; Berlak, 1999; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2002). The literature on diversity courses has offered some suggestions for combating this challenge. For example, Stewart, Crary, and Humberd (2008) suggested that students from dominant groups (typically White, heterosexual, male students) may be less resistant to participate in class discussions if their voices and stories are also incorporated, rather than only the voices and stories of minority students. Martinez (2014) suggested that students may be more open to accepting systemic inequalities as reality if they are presented with statistical evidence rather than with anecdotes describing intolerance and discrimination.

Instructors of color are disproportionately more likely to teach diversity courses than those who identify as non-White (McKay, 1997; Nelson Laird, 2011; Perry, Moore, Acosta, Edwards, & Frey, 2006; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009), and these instructors may face a particular set of challenges. In a qualitative study involving in-depth interviews with twenty diversity instructors of color at predominately White institutions in the Midwest, Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, and Frey (2009) found that the instructors in the study were regularly met with resistance – if not outright hostility – from some students. Students often challenged the instructors’ credibility or authority, leading many instructors to present students with additional materials that they had not originally planned to include in their courses. Instructors hoped that by bringing in more evidence for social inequality, students might be more willing to accept the ideas expressed in class. Instructors also noted that students often viewed them as racist or biased, thus questioning their ability to teach the material fairly (Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). These results are concerning because they indicate that students may leave

diversity courses with even less understanding of issues related to diversity than when they arrived. Students' resistance to or rejection of diversity material is a common challenge for diversity instructors, but instructors of color may be more likely to experience this reaction from students (Ahlquist, 1991; Berlak, 1999; Brown, 2004; Bowman, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that human development should be the organizing principle for higher education, and that an institution's fundamental aspects such as curricula, teaching practices, and programs and services for students should be purposefully crafted to promote development. Programs and services intended to encourage interaction with diversity on campus has the potential to promote cognitive and social development through supportive campus environments, but if poorly executed, may also result in negative interactions among peers. Such negative interactions may not only perpetuate unwelcoming campus environments, they may also reduce the potential benefits of diversity education (Roska et al., 2017).

With or without the tensions that may arise because of campus diversity, exposure to and interaction with diverse peers can affect how students make sense of themselves (Jones & Abes, 2013; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). College student identity development theories contend that identity is contextual, and as such, interacting with diverse others affects how students understand themselves (Jones & Abes, 2013). The study of college student identity development provides insight into how students come to understand their own identities and the ways in which interactions with diverse peers can affect this process. The following section provides an overview of college student identity development with an emphasis on theories and models

related to multiple dimensions of identity, which served as the theoretical framework for this study.

### **Identity Development of College Students**

The study of college student identity development is housed under the broader topic of student development theory (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). Born out of campus unrest in the 1960s, student development theory sought to understand the ways in which traditional-aged college students make meaning of themselves and the world. Student development was defined by Rodgers (1990) as “the ways that a student grows, progresses, or increases his or her developmental capabilities as a result of enrollment in an institution of higher education” (p. 27). Though identity development is only one aspect of the overall development of college students, understanding this aspect is “necessary if one is to understand college students and their experiences in higher education contexts” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 19).

Theories and models for understanding identity development grew from the foundational work of Erikson (1968) and Chickering (1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and are rooted in multiple disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and social psychology (Jones & Abes, 2013; Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Such theories “focus on identity as a developmental progression from simple, conferred ideas...to more complex understandings of what makes up identity”; suggest that “identity is socially constructed and reconstructed”; and include “consideration of the environment or context, a complex system that influences behaviors, attitudes, and cognition” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 582).

The foundational identity development theories, particularly the work of Erikson and Chickering, focused primarily on the experiences of White men or White women (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). In response to this gap in the research, “coupled with such major social

forces the civil rights movement, women's movement, and gay rights movement and the growing diversity of student populations in U.S. higher education" (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 35), researchers began to examine identity development specific to members of particular social groups. Current identity models and theories address the development of many different social identities, including Black and African identity (Cross, 1991; Cross & Fhagen-Smith, 2001; Helms, 1990; Jackson, 2001; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998); White identity (Helms, 1994; Rowe, Bennett & Atkinson, 1994); Native American identity (Horse, 2001); Asian and Pacific Islander identity (Kim, 1981, 2001; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2001, 2002); Latino/Latina identity (Casas & Pytluk, 1995; Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001; Torres, 2003); and multiracial and biracial identity (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995; Renn, 2000). Frameworks for understanding identity development with regard to sexuality (Cass, 1979, 1996; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002) and women (Josselson, 1987, 1996) have also been addressed.

Models and theories of identity development, though useful for understanding the experiences of college students, thus making easier the task of creating programs, services, and curricula to better meet students' needs (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016), can be inadequate or problematic and may not necessarily work for all students. Because identities are dynamic and contextual, even the experiences of individuals who identify with a particular social group may not fit neatly into one theoretical model or framework. Theories that reveal a more holistic understanding of students' multiple, layered, contextual, and fluid identities may be more useful for understanding the complex experiences of individuals and may be more useful for higher education practitioners working to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Jones &

Abes, 2013). The framework used in this study, multiple dimensions of identity theory, employs such a holistic approach.

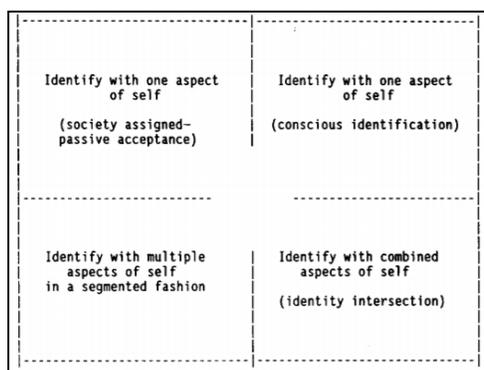
### **Multiple Dimensions of Identity Theory and Models**

Theories and models that examine the multiple dimensions of identity were built from research on oppression of underrepresented groups (Jones & Abes, 2013). As with the identity development research mentioned previously, this body of scholarship arose with the recognition that the foundational research on student identity development involved primarily White subjects. Research that followed sought to understand the experiences of individuals from underrepresented social groups and to highlight the ways in which identity is socially constructed and dependent on systemic privilege and oppression (Jones & Abes, 2013; Torres, Jones, & Abes, 2009). Andersen and Collins (2010) noted that systemic power and oppression, particularly as it relates to race, class, and gender, were vital topics for study in that they are “among the most significant social facts of people’s lives” (p. 1). Because Andersen and Collins’ (2010) work indicated these three aspects of identity exist simultaneously and intersect, Jones and Abes (2013) suggested, “An individual may possess both privileged and oppressed identities” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 59).

Reynolds and Pope’s (1991) Multidimensional Identity Model (MIM, Figure 1) was one of the first conceptualizations of how multiple dimensions of identity function together. The model consists of four quadrants, each containing a method of “resolv[ing] the realities of membership in more than one oppressed group” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 61):

- (1) Identify with one aspect of self (society assigned – passive acceptance): The individual passively identifies with one aspect of identity that is socially assigned, such as race, gender, or sexuality.

- (2) Identify with one aspect of self (conscious identification): The individual identifies with one aspect of identity that he or she chooses, typically one that is viewed as least oppressed.
- (3) Identify with multiple aspects of self in a segmented fashion: The individual identifies with more than one aspect of identity, but not necessarily at any given time. For example, a person may identify as both Black and lesbian, but may only identify as one or the other in a given context.
- (4) Identify with combined aspects of self (identity intersection): The individual actively identifies with more than one aspect of identity, particularly those viewed as most oppressed (Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & Abes, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991).



*Figure 1: Multidimensional Identity Model (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 179)*

The MIM is an important framework for understanding that identities can coexist simultaneously and are dependent on context. However, both oppressed and privileged identities can exist simultaneously, and the MIM focuses primarily on the position of oppressed identities (Jones & Abes, 2013). Jones and McEwen's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI, Figure 2) provides a visualization for understanding the contextual, dynamic nature of *both* oppressed and privileged identities. As described by Jones and Abes (2013), the MMDI is,

anchored in several areas of scholarship, including foundational theories of student development; research on identity development among underrepresented groups; and sociological and social psychological perspectives that distinguish between personal and social identities, foregrounding the socially constructed nature of identity and the importance of social context (p. 77).

At the center of the MMDI is a “core” identity, an internally identified aspect of an individual’s personality that is more or less consistent regardless of context (Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Surrounding the core are several rings, each of which contains a dot representative of the various dimensions of an individual’s identity: sexual orientation, culture, race, gender, religion, and social class. These dimensions are fluid and move closer to or farther away from the core, depending on context; the closer the dimensions are to the core, the more salient they become. The salience of particular dimensions of identity is increased when an individual experiences oppression or discrimination of that particular dimension; this “external scrutiny” of a dimension increases “internal awareness” of the dimension, thus resulting in increased salience (p. 410). Regardless of its salience (i.e., its distance from the core), each of the dimensions is always present, and more than one may have equal salience at any given time.

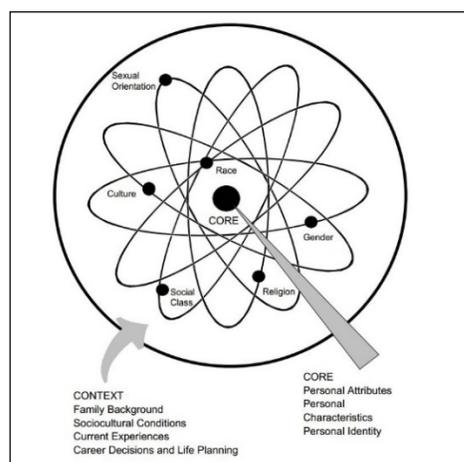


Figure 2: Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000)

The MMDI grew out of the work of Susan Jones (1995, 1997), who sought to examine the “self-perceived identities among a diverse group of women college students when such identities as gender, race, and sexual orientation were considered” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 64). In a grounded theory study involving interviews with a purposefully sampled group of 10 college women, Jones identified 10 major themes that “represent(ed) a dynamic interplay of personal identity or core identity, social identities, identity salience, and contextual influences” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 70). The 10 themes listed below are visualized in the MMDI, and illuminate the fluid, context-based nature of the dimensions of identity:

- (1) Multiple layers of identity
- (2) Importance of cultural identification and cultural values
- (3) Relational, inclusive values and guiding personal beliefs
- (4) Braiding of gender
- (5) Multiple ways race matters
- (6) Relative salience of identity dimensions
- (7) Searching for identity
- (8) Current experiences and situational factors
- (9) Influence of family
- (10) Decisions and future planning (Jones, 1995; Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 78).

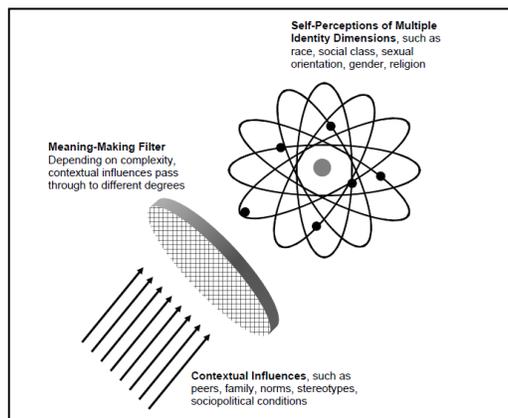
Among Jones’ (1995, 1997) findings was that the salience of a particular dimension of identity is informed by an individual’s sense of being “different.” If an individual is in a situation in which she is the only person of a particular race, culture, or sexual orientation, for example, that dimension of identity is likely to be most salient at that moment. Participants in Jones’ study also reported that being different physically – for example, not “looking like” a member of a

particular race or ethnic group – also influenced the salience of that dimension of identity (Jones, 1995, 1997; Jones & Abes, 2013). Another of Jones’ (1995, 1997) findings, the theme of “braiding of gender,” revealed the ways in which multiple identities can overlap and intersect. The thread that connected all of the identities in Jones’ study was participants’ gender. The participants in Jones’ original study all identified as women, and they identified across different races, ethnicities, and sexual orientations. Although each was aware of her gender as an important dimension of her identity, she did not consider her gender “central in and of itself” (Jones & Abes, 2013, p 73). Instead, gender was often intertwined with other dimensions such as race or nationality, “for example, Black woman, Jewish woman, or lesbian woman” (p. 73).

Jones’ original research and the subsequent MMDI are useful for understanding the ways in which different aspects of identity function together in different contexts. Jones and Abes (2013) described the MMDI as “simplistic because it portrays the complexities of identity in a straightforward and clear way,” yet “complex because it illustrates the nuances of identity by incorporating multiple and intersecting identities and the influence of contextual factors” (p. 91-92). Despite the versatility of the MMDI, it is not without limitations. As Jones and Abes (2013) pointed out, the research on which the model was based only examined women, and the sample size used in Jones’ original study was relatively small. Further, the MMDI does not fully capture the intersections of different identities, nor does it address the process by which identity is created.

In order to address some of the limitations of the MMDI, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) created the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI, Figure 3). The RMMDI offers a more complete picture of the multiple dimensions of identity by providing a visualization of the *process* by which an individual develops identity. In addition to

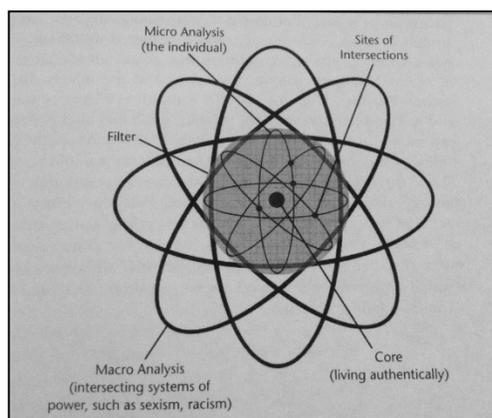
the original MMDI with the static core identity and orbiting identity dimensions, the reconceptualized model also includes a “meaning-making filter” through which individuals process contextual factors in order to construct their identities. The inclusion of the meaning-making filter “provide[s] a richer portrayal of not only what relationships students perceive among their personal and social identities, but also how they come to perceive them as they do” (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007, p. 13).



*Figure 3: Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007)*

Jones and Abes (2013) suggested that the MMDI and RMMDI may be strengthened further by applying them in conjunction with other theoretical frameworks, such as intersectionality, queer theory, and critical race theory. They suggested that adding these lenses may provide a more nuanced understanding of identities. For example, though the MMDI was not created with an intersectional lens, Jones and Abes (2013) noted several “points of congruence” between the MMDI and intersectionality, particularly “the emphasis on context, the attention to identity salience, and the assumption of multiple social identities” (p. 157). They suggested, however, that despite these parallels, the components of the MMDI would shift when viewed through the lens of intersectionality. Together with Stephen John Quaye, Jones and Abes developed an Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (I-MMDI, Figure 4)

(Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 161). The I-MMDI includes features of the MMDI including the core identity, but also includes a visualization of the points at which identities intersect for both the individual (the micro analysis) and in the context of systemic oppression and power (the macro analysis).



*Figure 4: Intersectional Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Developed by Jones, Abes, and Quayle, in Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 161)*

## **Conclusion**

The expansions and improvements made to the MMDI through Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) reconceptualized model and the addition of intersectionality resulting in the I-MMDI suggest that the original model has room to grow. Although outside the scope of this study, grounded theory research may reveal new ways of adding to and enhancing the MMDI, adding to the overall body of literature for understanding the identity development of college students. For this study, however, models of multiple dimensions of identity provided a useful framework for understanding how students understand their own contextual, shifting identities as they navigate being both college students and diversity workshop facilitators.

## **Summary**

The diversity workshops facilitated by participants in this study are identity-based and, as are other diversity courses tied to identity, rely heavily on the notion that identities are socially

constructed, context-dependent, and dynamic (Gurin, Nagda, & Zúñiga, 2013). As the diversity workshops teach students to understand the concept of identity through lecture and dialogue, students may also come to understand their own identities by examining the experiences of others. Diversity programs in general “often focus on exposure to other social groups and an understanding of how history supports society’s view of these groups” (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 577). These interactions may influence an individual’s sense of identity by placing them in the context of other identities and their social construction.

The participants in this study have had their own interactions with diversity as they facilitated workshops. Because diversity courses and workshops may be difficult to implement because of conflicts and miscommunication in the classroom, it is important to understand how these interactions affected these students’ overall college experiences. Further, as described more in detail in Chapter 4, a large majority of participants identify as non-White, following the national trend of diversity instructors being disproportionately people of color. These instructors often face a particular set of challenges as they teach diversity material, and students of color who teach diversity are likely to be just as susceptible to these same challenges. The difference, of course, is that they are students; though faculty may be comfortable and confident with their own identities and therefore, perhaps, better emotionally equipped to deal with hostility and miscommunication that may arise in the classroom, students undergoing a critical period of development might have more difficulty processing their experiences.

This study builds on the research explored in this chapter by adding the voices of students who facilitate diversity workshops while undergoing their own identity development as college students. In Chapter 3, I discuss the methods used for building on the research outlined in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative exploration of the experiences of undergraduate students who facilitated a diversity workshop for first-year students at a large Midwestern university. The primary research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. How do students' experiences facilitating diversity workshops inform how they make sense of their social identities?
2. How do students' multiple dimensions of identity shift as they navigate being both college students and diversity workshop facilitators?

In this chapter, I provide a rationale for using a qualitative research design to address these questions and describe the study's participant pool and sample selection processes, data collection and analysis methods, and the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness of findings and to address (my) researcher biases and assumptions.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

This study aimed to better understand the ways in which students' experiences facilitating a diversity workshop influence how they process and understand their own identities. To this end, the study followed an exploratory qualitative research design.

A qualitative research design was appropriate for this study as its primary purposes and research questions aligned with the goals of qualitative research "to better understand human behavior and experience, to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what these meanings are" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 43). Specifically, this study intended to explore students' experiences as diversity workshop facilitators and the processes by which they make sense of their identities in this context. Also in line with qualitative research,

the study was guided by established theory (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, multiple dimensions of identity theory served as a theoretical framework for the study and guided its research questions, interview protocol, and data analysis and interpretation procedures (Creswell, 2008) and helped to illuminate participants' experiences and the ways in which they construct, process, and make meaning of their identities, both in and out of the context of the diversity workshops.

Qualitative data collection methods (i.e., semi-structured interviews) were appropriate for this study in that they allowed for a richly descriptive account of students' experiences (Merriam, 2009). Although the interview questions were guided by the study's purpose and theoretical framework, they were largely open-ended, allowing me, as the interviewer, to "respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Structuring the interviews in this way allowed the voices of participants to emerge, providing a nuanced and complex account of the experiences most salient to them.

Although this study did not follow a narrative research design, the final analysis does exhibit some characteristics of narrative research. As narrative research "seeks to explore the meaning of the individual's experiences as told through a story or stories" (Creswell, 2002, p. 525), this study was designed to allow participants to reflect on their experiences and tell stories of how they have made sense of their own identities. Semi-structured interviews, though guided by theory and situated within the boundaries of this study, provided participants room to tell their own "stories of lived experience" (Merriam, 2009, p. 33). These stories allowed for rich description of students' experiences, thus illuminating how they make sense of themselves and their identities.

## **Participants and Program Overview**

The 13 participants I interviewed for this study were drawn from a pool of 52 undergraduate students and one non-degree-seeking graduate student who facilitated diversity workshops for first-year students at a large, predominately White, Midwestern university during the spring semester of 2017.

The diversity workshops that participants in this study facilitated were created as part of a university-wide initiative to increase students' understanding of diversity and inclusion issues. The specific guidelines for diversity education were outlined in an administrative report that was released in the wake of racially charged incidents on campus. The report called for the institution of a mandatory, week-or-semester-long, one-credit-hour course included in orientation activities for first-year students. The goals of the course included introducing students to issues surrounding privilege and oppression across various identity groups in effort to build an inclusive campus environment for all students. Although the report called for creation of a semester-long course, the final product was an hour-long workshop that first-year students were required to attend during their second semester on campus. The workshop followed this format until it was extended to two hours during the spring semester of 2017. The workshop is housed under the diversity education program in the university's student affairs division.

The diversity workshop is one of three workshops all students are required to attend during their first year on campus; the other two workshops, facilitated during the fall semester, address sexual assault and alcohol safety. Approximately 30 workshops are held each week between late-January and mid-March, sometimes as many as six on a single night. Although students are told the workshops are mandatory, attendance is not recorded, and there are no consequences for failing to attend. The number of students who attend the workshops rises each

year due to ever-increasing campus enrollment, but the percentage of first-year students who attend declines each year. During the spring 2017 semester, attendance of first-year students was about 84%, approximately 7,500 out of nearly 9,000 first-year students.

Two undergraduate students who apply and are paid for their work facilitate each workshop. Facilitators typically lead one or two workshops each per week, but this number varies depending on facilitators' schedules and their willingness to act as a substitute if another facilitator has an emergency or scheduling conflict. During the year this study was conducted, one student facilitated 23 workshops, while another, who could only work on specific days at specific times, facilitated only six. Because facilitators are assigned to facilitate the workshops that fit their schedules, they work with many different facilitators throughout the semester and rarely work with the same co-facilitator more than twice.

Workshops follow a script written by the program's director. Each workshop, according to the script, should last two hours. As mentioned previously, before the spring 2017 semester, workshops were one-hour long. The extra hour was added so that facilitators and participants could discuss practical applications of what was being taught in the workshops, such as bystander intervention. Though workshops were supposed to last the full two hours, some facilitators reported ending after an hour and a half or less. Reasons for shorter workshops vary, but according to the workshop director, the more confident facilitators were more likely to use the full two hours and less experienced facilitators often ended their workshops early.

### **Selection and Training of Facilitators**

The program's director and a graduate assistant interview and select workshop facilitators during the fall semester. Facilitators are typically undergraduates in their sophomore, junior, or senior years, though during the spring 2017 semester, one non-degree-seeking graduate student

also facilitated. Recruitment of facilitators occurs through advertisements that the program's director emails to cultural organizations, socially progressive groups, and student affairs offices on campus. The director may also approach individual students who have expressed interest in facilitating. Students also learn about the facilitation position through word-of-mouth from friends or acquaintances who have facilitated workshops in previous years. Advertisements for the facilitator position encourage students of color, students in the LGBTQ community, students with disabilities, and women to apply. The majority of applicants are students of color, very few are men, and fewer still are White men. In fact, during the year this study was conducted, there were no White male facilitators; one applied but was determined to be unqualified for the position.

Students apply to become facilitators by submitting a resume and writing a brief essay on why they are interested in facilitating workshops. Though the essay is a useful starting point for determining which students to consider for the position, face-to-face interviews provide workshop staff a better sense of the candidates' qualifications, experiences, and motivations for applying. The program director and graduate assistant interview candidates for 30 minutes each and ask questions about students' experiences facilitating difficult conversations, perspective taking, intercultural skills, and anticipated challenges of facilitating workshops. According to the director, facilitators are selected based on their ability to "articulate the significance of identity and social group membership on campus through a variety of lenses" and who display empathy for others' experiences. Though experience with education or public speaking is preferred, students without such experience may be hired if they display a "firm grasp" of workshop content. Each year approximately 70 students apply to be facilitators, and of those, 45 to 60 are hired. The number of facilitators hired, as well as the number of workshops held each year,

depends on the number of workshops needed to accommodate the incoming class of first-year students. Facilitators are paid \$9 per hour for their work.

Most facilitators hired for the spring 2017 semester did not attend a full course on facilitation prior to becoming facilitators. Instead, they attended a total of 16 hours of training during the fall 2016 semester, an increase from 10-12 hours in previous years. Students were hired in October 2016, and training was held over three Saturdays in November and December. In addition to the Saturday training, facilitators were also required to practice the script with other facilitators for at least four hours. Training focused on three areas: content to be discussed in the workshops; the facilitation skills required for this work and how to manage issues that might arise during the workshops; and facilitators' responsibilities and employee logistics, such as timekeeping and payroll procedures. Although training is a required aspect of facilitator responsibilities, not all facilitators attended all hours of training.

The first training day, led by the program's graduate assistant, consisted of an in-depth discussion of power, privilege, and oppression and how these forces function on campus and how they affect students. Subsequent training included discussions regarding the workshop's script and role-playing activities designed to give facilitators a sense of what would occur during facilitations. Although returning facilitators had attended training in previous years, they were also required to attend the training in 2016; workshop staff encouraged the returning facilitators who were present at the training to help with questions from new facilitators about the facilitation experience.

### **Recruitment Procedures**

Participants for this study were recruited through email. The workshop program's director sent a recruitment email to all spring 2017 workshop facilitators in May, June, and

August of 2017. The initial recruitment email, approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), informed students of their rights as participants, specifically, that (1) participation in the project was voluntary, and participation was not connected to an evaluation or assessment of their performance as facilitators; (2) choosing to participate (or declining to participate) in the study would not affect students' roles as facilitators, nor would this information be provided to the program's director or anyone else affiliated with the program; (3) all emails and other correspondence between participants and me would be kept confidential throughout the study and after it was completed, and (4) students were allowed to discontinue participation in the study at any time. The recruitment email contained information regarding interview procedures, including information on audio recording and note taking, and the time commitment required to participate in the study. The recruitment email also informed potential participants that they must be at least 18 years of age to participate in the study and included contact information for the study's principal investigator, the IRB office, and me. The email asked students to initially provide consent to participate by sending a response email to me, and I obtained written consent before each interview. Participants were compensated with a \$15 Starbucks gift card once the interview was complete.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study involved face-to-face interviews with each of the 13 participants. Interviews were held between May and September of 2017 and took place in common areas on campus. Interviews followed a semi-structured protocol, lasted approximately forty-five minutes to one hour, and were audio recorded on a standard digital recorder. I transcribed the recordings myself as soon as practicable after each interview, allowing me to

better familiarize myself with the data and ensure that the transcripts were accurate (Merriam, 2009).

The semi-structured interview protocol used in this study was intended to “gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words” in order to “develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world” (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007. p. 103). Interview questions were open-ended, with follow-up and probing questions asked as appropriate. Because the study employed multiple dimensions of identity theory as a framework, the questions asked were similarly structured to those used in Jones’ (1995) study on the multiple dimensions of identity development of undergraduate women, the foundational study from which the original Model of Multiple Dimension of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000) was built. In order to gauge the effectiveness of the interview questions, I used the first two interviews as pilot interviews to help determine whether the questions were difficult to understand or needed to be rewritten or presented in a different manner, and to reveal any questions which might have been missing from the protocol that would be useful for the study (Merriam, 2009). Because I conducted analysis as I collected data, I reworded some interview questions and altered the order in which I asked them in order to receive higher-quality data that would better align with my ongoing analysis.

The protocol for the first interview consisted of two sets of questions. The first set focused on participants’ perceptions of their own identities, the experiences that have influenced these identities, and how the identities may change depending on context. The second set focused on participants’ perceptions of their identities relative to their experiences facilitating diversity workshops. Once each interview was completed and transcribed, I allowed participants an opportunity to read the interview transcripts and provide clarifications and comments through email or by adding comments to a Microsoft Word document. Only two participants responded

with edits to their interview transcripts. I also informed participants that they may also request a follow-up interview to provide clarifications; none of the participants requested an additional interview.

Before the interviews, participants completed a brief questionnaire<sup>3</sup> consisting of 15 questions related to how participants identify with regard to the six aspects of identity described in Jones and McEwen's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity: race, religion, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and culture. The survey helped to establish the ways in which participants identify themselves, offered insights into participants' backgrounds, and provided a reference point for me during data analysis.

### **Data Analysis**

The primary data analyzed for this study consisted of interview transcripts and notes I took during the interviews. Other materials included the pre-interview questionnaire administered before each interview and training and educational materials for workshop facilitators. I also had multiple conversations, via email and in person, with the workshop's director and graduate assistant to better understand the workshop program, its background, structure and purpose, recruitment, hiring, and training procedures, and support systems in place for workshop facilitators.

Data analysis occurred "simultaneously with data collection" (Merriam, 2009, p. 171) and was ongoing throughout the study and final write-up. Analysis began with a process of open coding used to categorize major themes in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Following Merriam's (2009) suggestion for coding procedures, I created memos detailing the particular aspects of each category I found through open coding. I then used a process of axial coding to

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for a chart containing participants' responses to the questionnaire.

connect the themes I identified during open coding and to identify patterns across participants' responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I also used a priori codes to identify themes in the data related to the study's theoretical framework (Merriam, 2009). These categories included participants' awareness of the multiple dimensions of their identities, the salience of these dimensions of identities, experiences that have shaped participants' perceptions of their identities, and how identities shift depending on context. I also established a priori categories relating to the literature on diversity courses and the experiences of diversity instructors.

### **Trustworthiness of Findings**

Just as taking steps to ensure validity and reliability in quantitative research promotes confidence in the studies' findings, establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research meets the same goal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because the results of this study relied primarily on one data source (i.e., participant interviews), triangulation through multiple data sources was not possible. However, I sought to ensure trustworthiness of findings through the use of peer debriefers and member checking. I enlisted the help of two trusted colleagues in the field of higher education to serve as a peer debriefing team for the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I further ensured trustworthiness of findings through member checking. As mentioned previously, I allowed participants to read interview transcripts before analysis began, providing them an opportunity to clarify any statements, add information or comments, and confirm that the data accurately reflected their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

### **Biases and Assumptions**

Going into this study, I understood that no research is without biases and assumptions, and I recognized the importance of being aware that my background and perspectives had the potential to influence the conclusions I reached through my analysis. I was also aware that my

interest in identity development of college students, particularly as it relates to race and ethnicity, is due in large part to my position of privilege. I identify as a White, heterosexual female. I was born in the U.S., as were my parents and grandparents. The identities capable of creating a sense of difference between my peers and me, particularly, being a first-generation college student and having been born into a lower socioeconomic status, are relatively hidden; others may not be aware of these aspects of my life unless I share them. Although growing up in the South gave me front-row access to racism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia, I was never directly discriminated against. As an undergraduate and graduate student, my experiences with campus climate have been positive, in large part because the ways in which I identify have never made me a target for hostility or discrimination. The fact that I have never experienced the discrimination and unwelcoming environment that many students of color or students from historically marginalized groups experience on college campuses has made me curious about the experiences of others, and that curiosity is what led me to pursue this research. I understand, however, that being curious and open to hearing others' perspectives and voices does not exempt my interpretation of their stories from being influenced by my own assumptions.

Bogdan and Bilken (2007) suggested that researchers should strive “to become more reflective and conscious of how who [they] are may shape and enrich what [they] do, not to eliminate it” (p. 38). To this end, I took several steps to ensure that I was aware of how my own perspectives and experiences may influence my work and to keep me aware of my position as a researcher. Specifically, I used reflexive journaling to record my reactions, thoughts, and emotions after each interview. This method of journaling allowed me to lessen the extent to which my background, perspectives, previously held notions, biases, or assumptions influenced the study's findings (Guba, 1981). I also consulted my debriefing team, each of whom I trusted

to ask questions and push me to question the ways in which my knowledge and background might be influencing my work.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of undergraduate students who facilitated diversity workshops for their peers and to gain insight into the ways in which teaching their peers about identity, diversity, and inclusion impacted how they reflected upon and made sense of their own identities. In this chapter, I provide profiles of each of the study's 13 participants and present the study's findings.

### Participant Profiles

Participants in this study consisted of 13 students who facilitated diversity workshops between January and March of 2017. Twelve of the participants facilitated workshops as undergraduates, and one, a recent alumna of the university, facilitated while attending classes as a non-degree-seeking graduate student. This section provides profiles of each of the 13 participants.

#### Alex<sup>4</sup>

At the time of our interview, Alex had just earned a degree in molecular and cellular biology and psychology and was preparing to move to England to complete a yearlong master's program in biology. Alex identifies as a gay, Black/African American<sup>5</sup> male. He attended a predominately White<sup>6</sup>, private, Catholic high school in the suburbs of a major U.S. city. Although he attended Catholic schools for most of his education, he now identifies as non-

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<sup>4</sup> I have changed all participants' names to protect their anonymity. Participants either chose their own pseudonyms or gave me permission to choose pseudonyms for them. See Appendix A for a chart of participants' responses to the pre-interview questionnaire.

<sup>5</sup> I have listed participants' racial identities as they described themselves in the interviews. Alex, for example, used Black and African American interchangeably to describe himself.

<sup>6</sup> "Predominately white" refers to institutions with White students comprising more than 50% of the student population. To obtain this information, participants named their high schools on the pre-interview questionnaire, and I located the schools' demographic information on school, state, or other public websites.

denominational Christian and participates regularly in religious activities. He facilitated workshops during both his junior and senior years. Alex became a workshop facilitator because he had a desire to use his voice and experience to inspire positive change on campus and because he felt confident in his ability to discuss diversity and inclusion topics in a group setting.

### **Alicia**

Alicia is a senior majoring in health administration. She identifies as a straight, Black/Nigerian American female. Her parents were born in Nigeria, and she has lived with her mother and four siblings in the U.S. since birth. She identifies as Christian. She attended a high school/college dual enrollment program in which she earned a degree in web-based graphic design. She is active in several student organizations, including a community service fraternity and an African cultural organization. Alicia facilitated workshops during her junior year, and would like to do so again, but is instead planning to study abroad during the second semester of her senior year. She decided to become a facilitator because she is passionate about diversity and wanted to teach others about the value of inclusion and acceptance of other cultures.

### **Alonzo**

Alonzo is in his third year at the university and pursuing a degree in neuroscience. Although he has enough credits to be considered a junior, he changed his major from psychology to a pre-med track in neuroscience during his sophomore year, and most of the courses he was enrolled in at the time of our interview were for second-year students in the program. Alonzo identifies as a gay, Afro-Latino male. His first language is Spanish. His father, who was born in Ecuador, and his mother, who was born in the Dominican Republic, met in the U.S., where Alonzo was born. He was raised in a major U.S. city, both in the city proper and its suburbs, and attended a predominately White, public suburban high school. He was raised Catholic but now

identifies as atheist. Alonzo facilitated workshops during his second year on campus, and first became interested in facilitating workshops because he felt that he could offer more depth to the workshops that was being provided due to his knowledge of social justice issues and current political and social events.

### **Aneesa**

Aneesa is a senior majoring in economics. Her parents emigrated from India, and she and her three siblings were born and raised in the suburbs of a major U.S. city. She attended a large, predominately White high school. She identifies as Muslim. Although she and her sister do not wear hijabs, her mother does, and Aneesa is considering doing so in the future. She is on the executive board of the university's Muslim student organization and holds a part-time job on campus. She facilitated workshops during her sophomore and junior years and was considering facilitating again as a senior. Aneesa decided to become a facilitator because she felt it would help her explore others' opinions and assumptions about Muslims so that she might be able to offer them a different perspective.

### **Anne**

Anne is a senior double majoring in molecular and cellular biology and psychology. She identifies as a straight, White, Middle Eastern female. She identifies as Muslim, does not wear a hijab, and participates in religious activities several times a week. She is fluent in both English and Arabic, and attended a predominately White public high school in the suburbs of a major U.S. city. She is active in a service fraternity on campus and the university's Muslim student organization. Anne facilitated workshops during her junior year and, at the time of our interview, planned to return as a senior. She decided to become a facilitator because she enjoyed her

experience in the workshop as a first-year student and had developed an interest in social justice through her coursework and other experiences on campus.

### **Ayesha**

Ayesha is senior majoring in history, global studies, and Spanish. She identifies as a straight, Middle Eastern and Arab American female. Her parents emigrated from Syria, and she was born and raised in the suburbs of a major U.S. city. She identifies as Muslim, wears a hijab, and attended a private, Islamic high school. She is active in the university's Muslim student organization. Ayesha facilitated workshops during her junior year and hoped to return as a senior if her schedule allowed her enough time to commit to the job. She became a facilitator because she felt that being a Muslim in the U.S. gave her a unique perspective on diversity and that growing up in a neighborhood with people who identify in similar ways limited her exposure people from different backgrounds, which inspired her to learn about and teach others about new perspectives.

### **Benjamin**

Benjamin is a junior studying Latino studies and English. He identifies as a pansexual, transgender male. During his early childhood, his family lived in a predominately Black neighborhood in a major U.S. city but moved to a small, rural, predominately White town in a neighboring state when he was 10 years old. He identifies as Mexican, Guatemalan, and Puerto Rican and was often the only Latinx student in his elementary, middle, and high school classes. He identifies as Catholic, but his religious practice is also heavily influenced by his grandmother's practice of Santeria. He is involved with several student organizations, including one for LGBTQ students of color and a Mexican student group. He also founded a group on campus for students of Central American heritage. Benjamin facilitated workshops during his

sophomore year. He decided to become a facilitator because he felt the position aligned with his experiences facilitating discussions in his student organizations and that discussing identity in a group setting would help him prepare for a career as a Latino studies professor.

### **Katie**

Katie graduated with a degree in psychology two years before facilitating the diversity workshops, and at the time of our interview, was preparing to begin a master's program in education. She identifies as a straight, White female. Although she grew up attending church, she believes her family only attended for social purposes. She has never identified with any particular religion and now considers herself an atheist. She grew up in the town in which the university in the study is located and attended a predominately White high school. Her ancestry is Polish and her family has lived in the U.S. for several generations. Katie is the only participant in the study who did not attend the workshop as a first-year student; she entered the university before the workshops were implemented. She learned about and became interested in facilitating workshops while taking a social justice course taught by the program's director during her senior year. She felt that facilitating the workshop would help her build on the mentoring and leadership skills she had gained through experiences in her sorority and an internship on campus. She facilitated workshops while taking courses as a non-degree-seeking student to determine what type of graduate degree she wanted to pursue. Because she was not an undergraduate, Katie was not paid for her work as a facilitator.

### **Leslie**

Leslie is a senior majoring in learning and education studies with a minor in sociology. She identifies as a bisexual, White female. She is a member of the university marching band and is the president of an organization on campus devoted to providing accurate sexual health

information to students. She identifies as atheist. She attended a structurally diverse high school in the suburbs of a major U.S. city and was the first in her family to attend college. She facilitated workshops during her sophomore and junior years and hoped to return as a senior. Leslie decided to become a workshop facilitator because her first-year roommate, then a junior, was a facilitator and often talked about how much she enjoyed the experience. Leslie felt she would be able to speak about issues of oppression and privilege due to the financial challenges she and her family had experienced when she was a child.

### **Miah**

Miah is a senior studying integrative biology and business. She attended a small, selective, structurally diverse preparatory high school in the suburbs of a large U.S. city. Her parents emigrated from Bangladesh, and because she was born in the U.S., she prefers to identify as American rather than Bengali. She identifies as a straight, Sunni Muslim female. Like her mother, Miah wears a hijab, although she says she is stricter about wearing it consistently than her mom. In addition to her work as a facilitator, she holds an executive position in the university's Muslim student organization and a part-time job working at the front desk of an administrative office on campus. She facilitated workshops during her sophomore and junior years and hoped to return during her senior year. Miah decided to become a facilitator because of her positive experience in the workshop as a first-year student. She felt that the other two mandatory workshops she attended, one on sexual assault and one on alcohol safety, were not relevant to her, but she found what she learned in the diversity workshop about the perspectives of other students, particularly those who identify as African American and Jewish, to be interesting and new. She wanted to become a facilitator so that she could learn more about others' experiences.

## **Rachael**

Rachael is a senior in the political science honors program. Her parents emigrated from Syria, and Rachael was born and raised in the suburbs of a major U.S. city. She attended a Muslim school until ninth grade, when she transferred to a large, public, predominately White suburban high school. She identifies as a straight, Muslim female. She is active in the university's Muslim student organization, and like her mother, she wears a hijab. In her first and second years on campus, participated in Model United Nations. She facilitated workshops during her sophomore and junior years and hoped to facilitate during her senior year. Rachael wanted to become a facilitator because she noticed that many students typically interact only with students who have similar identities and backgrounds. She felt that students needed to hear different perspectives so that the campus could be more welcoming for all students and that she would be able to talk effectively with others about diversity and inclusion.

## **Sarah**

Sarah is a junior majoring in psychology. She identifies as a straight, White female who is agnostic and rarely participates in religious activities. She attended a mostly White (nearly 80%) public high school in a small, rural town. Sarah is active in many campus organizations. She serves on the executive boards of both her social sorority and a school spirit organization, assists with research projects with faculty members, and facilitates a first-year experience course. She facilitated workshops during her sophomore year. While attending the workshop as a first-year student, Sarah noticed that some students were resistant to learning about diversity and inclusion. She decided to become a facilitator so that she could reach out to other resistant students to help create a more comfortable, welcoming environment for everyone on campus.

## **Zhang**

Zhang is a first-year doctoral student in psychology who facilitated workshops during his junior and senior years. He was born in Germany, raised in China, and moved to the U.S. for college. He identifies as non-religious and queer. During his undergraduate years on campus, he co-founded a student organization for LGBTQ international students, and he participates in a South Asian vocal group and an organization that allows students to engage in debate and discussion surrounding Chinese politics. Zhang became interested in facilitating workshops after attending a course on intergroup dialogue facilitation taught by the workshop program's director. Zhang was excited for the opportunity because he felt that the workshop he attended as a first-year student was boring and that he could make the workshop more interesting.

### **Findings and Themes**

This section is organized into three sub-sections: (a) How Identities are Shaped, (b) Multiple Dimensions of Identity, and (c) Identity and Facilitation. In the first sub-section, How Identities are Shaped, I provide findings related to how participants' identities have been shaped by their experiences and relationships with others. In the second sub-section, Multiple Dimension of Identity, I describe findings related to the multi-dimensional nature of participants' identities and the ways in which the multiple dimensions function together. In the final sub-section, Identity and Facilitation, I discuss how participants' identities function within the context of the diversity workshops, how facilitating affects participants' understanding of identity, and how this experience affects their interactions with others outside of the workshops.

#### **How Identities are Shaped**

As participants discussed how their identities have been shaped and how they have come to understand themselves, three major themes emerged: (1) Family and Pre-college Experiences,

(2) College Experiences, and (3) Political and Social Influences. In this section, I discuss these themes in chronological order of when the events or experiences occurred in participants' lives.

**Family and Pre-college Experiences.** Perhaps not surprising when considering young adults, most participants noted that family members, particularly parents, were highly influential in shaping who they are and how they understand themselves. Four participants specifically named their mothers as having been most influential in shaping them. Not only did these participants describe the close relationships they have with their mothers, each of them talked about the positive effects of watching their mothers endure and overcome hardships. Rachael, for example, described being inspired by her mother's perseverance and determination, saying,

So I have...my mom, she's a big influence on my life. She's a very successful doctor. She came from, like, nothing. She's the typical story of an immigrant: came from very little and established herself a lot, and she has a very successful career and she's very determined and hardworking. And her, I think, her work ethic influenced the way I want to be when I grow up. I want to be as strong as she is and as like, as hardworking as she is. She's a huge influence in my life.

Alicia also talked about her mother's determination, particularly how her mother raised five children on her own. She said,

My mother, yeah. She's my, she's who I look up to. Like, she's very determined and she...does things on her own. Like, yeah, I have a father, but he's in Nigeria, so it's only my mother with us. So she provides for us. She does everything on her own, pretty much.

Just as Alicia talked about her mother's becoming a sole parent after a separation, Leslie also described the challenges her mother overcame after separating from Leslie's father and how the experience of watching her mother persevere influenced her. She noted that seeing her mother

“go through those struggles taught me to become stronger and to persevere through issues like that.” Similarly, Benjamin, who was raised primarily by his mother and grandmother, described his mother’s perseverance in achieving her educational goals, and how this experience strengthened his relationship with his mother despite the differences in their college campus experiences. He said,

My mom is a migrant from Guatemala, and she went to [a small city college] and then went to [another university] and got her masters. So she kinda knows a little bit but she’s never been to a big campus. I’m the only one in my family [to attend a large university]. Um, so she’s definitely my rock.

Sarah also described the influence her parents have had on her, though in a different way. She talked about the impact of having a parent with mental illness and how this experience helped her become more open to others who may have their own difficulties. She said,

I have a parent who is very mentally ill, and I was never comfortable with talking about myself and, like, my home situation, and once I came to college and I realized that everybody is struggling and like, some people aren’t ok with sharing who they are, I wanted to be that person who made them feel comfortable enough in the setting to share who they are and share their story and be able to talk about who they are.

In addition to relationships with their families, some participants described events that occurred during their childhood and adolescence as being influential in shaping who they are. Similar to Sarah’s experience with mental illness in her family, Alonzo, who is active in numerous volunteer and service organizations, also had a difficult experience in his life that inspired him to reach out to others who may be suffering. The event that Alonzo recounted was his parents’ separation when Alonzo was about ten years old. After the separation, Alonzo chose

to move with his father to the suburbs while his mother and brother stayed in the city. This period in his life was particularly difficult because of his father's long work hours. Alonzo was left alone nearly all day, every day, requiring him to learn to take care of himself. He said,

So I was in the house by myself all the time so I'd, um, I had to cook by myself...I had to learn how to, like, take care of myself for a whole year. And my dad gave me money for the day. He's like, "here's 20 bucks," you know, "do whatever you can with it." And instead of just spending it like my brother would, I just kind of saved it all. So being alone for a while year, I mean, I technically wasn't alone, like I wasn't homeless, but it felt very, it felt how I feel now, like in an apartment, five years later. So, um, being alone really, like, it really sucked. I think, I wouldn't say I was depressed but I felt very lonely and there wasn't enough, no one there for me.

He went on to talk about how this difficult time in his life encouraged him to become active in volunteer work. He said,

So...when my parents got back together I was like, well, maybe I should just help people through the hard times and be nice to them because I went through something like that, kind of. And I don't want anyone else going through that.

Like Alonzo, Alicia described a life-changing, difficult event that had positive consequences for her. She talked about her motivation to achieve her academic and career goals, and, aside from being inspired by her mother, a knee injury caused her to shift her focus from sports to academics. Although it was a difficult experience at the time, she described the positive impact of going through recovery. She said,

I was very active when it comes to sports and everything in high school and then I had a knee problem, which I had to go to rehab for. And I felt like having to go through all the

rehab I did go through, it gave me like, more motivation in terms of, um, being determined at what I want to do. And even though I did stop sports, my focus was on school and like, exceeding in my studies and all that. That adversity molded me to become goal oriented because I felt like I would always have that knee problem and that was my faith, but with determination and dedication I was able to overcome the issue and I now am able to move freely and do what I love.

As outlined in this section, participants described family members and pre-college experiences as having significant influence on shaping who they are. The participants did not discuss how these influences shaped social identities, however. When participants described the significant experiences or relationships that I outlined in this section, they were describing the influences on aspects of their individual identities. The words participants used to describe themselves, for example, “determined,” “outgoing,” “devoted,” and “caring,” referred to aspects of themselves that they valued and that were not necessarily connected to their social identities. Participants also described how these aspects were further influenced by their experiences in college.

**College Experiences.** Going to college, and the new relationships and experiences they encountered there, influenced how participants think about and understand themselves. This section is divided into the three themes that emerged when participants described the college experiences that had the most influence on shaping who they are: (a) transitioning from home to college, (b) social interactions and relationships on campus, and (c) educational experiences.

***Transitioning from home to college.*** Several participants described the ways in which the transition from home to college was influential in shaping who they are and how they understand themselves. Participants reported that this transition was not always easy, but they

recognized that being forced to endure it made them more independent, more confident, and more comfortable with being who they want to be. Katie, for example, talked about learning from her academic missteps and how this experience forced her to become more mature. She stated,

I think college just shaped so much growing up. I'd done so much self-exploring in college because I was just, like, a perfectionist, smart person, didn't have to try in high school, 'cause everything was kind of simple. So there was a lot of failures in college that I wasn't expecting. And so then, like, having to grow from those.

Sarah, who mentioned having "a pretty bad home life," talked about both the positive and negative impacts of leaving home. She described how, ultimately, leaving a difficult home and family situation allowed her to find her own strength and voice. She said,

So, coming to campus and, first of all, being alone, you know, everyone is alone freshman year. You're kind of finding yourself. And so that was kind of compounded with the fact that I didn't have a home to go back to. I didn't really have anyone supporting me, and, so that's why I became even more outgoing than I already was, and that's why I'm always positive and supportive to everyone else because I know what it's like to not have anyone there for you. Um, so college, being away from that negative home situation has really allowed me...to be who I want to be, to be positive, to take care of my own life, to take care of my own self, and so I've learned to do that. And I've learned to branch out and um, do more for myself since, I've become pretty self-sufficient in the past couple years.

Miah, the first woman in her family to leave home for college, talked about the difficulty she encountered in balancing what she was learning in college about mental illness and how her

family managed her father's depression. She noted that a "cultural perspective" on mental illness may have prevented her family from taking action to help her father (such as seeking counseling or prescription medications), and said that this perspective directly conflicted with what she was learning in college about depression and mental health. Miah talked about trying to share what she had learned with her family and being met with resistance. This experience encouraged her to become more educated about mental health. She said,

When [my dad] had that whole depression thing, they thought it was like his medication or something. And I was like, "ok, guys, he needs probably a therapist or something." And they were like, "that's crazy, he doesn't need that." And so there was stuff like that going on at home, so that kind of pushed me to become a little bit more into trying to learn about that type of thing and trying to just, bring it back to the community and be like, "guys, we have to stop acting like this isn't happening."

As with the relationships with their families, participants did not explicitly discuss how transitioning from home to college affected their social identities, but rather focused on how this experience influenced their growth and development in other areas. Participants did, however, discuss the influence of social interactions and relationships on campus on how they understand their social identities.

***Social interactions and relationships on campus.*** Perhaps the most influential aspect of college that helped to shape how participants understand themselves were the relationships they have developed on campus. Some of the participants described how multiple people, not just one individual or one specific relationship, have influenced them. Alonzo noted that he had been shaped by a combination of people on campus, not just by one or two specific people. He

described this influence, as well as how getting to know people he admires encourages him to grow and improve as a person and how difficult this can be for him. He stated,

It's kind of hard to pinpoint certain people, I would say, just because a lot of it's like...I know I've seen things like people you hang out with are the people that make you, but I feel like, I disagree because, personally, at least, I have a lot of friends. 'Cause...there's qualities in each person I meet that I'm like, "I could be more like this and this and this and this." And it's very, it's tiring 'cause it's like, always improving is very exhausting, but at the same time, it just makes you a better person. And who doesn't like awesome people.

Similar to Alonzo, Aneesa also talked about how finding friends on campus helped her understand who she is relative to others. She said,

I didn't really know many people when I came to [this university]. Just my brother, but he had his own circle of friends; I didn't see him too much. But I found a group of friends here and I feel like I've learned a lot about myself through them just because they tell me certain habits I have or things like that that I didn't know that I did until they told me...Or like, what position I have in the group teaches me more about myself. So sometimes, say that like, um, sometimes I'm like a leader for them, or I'm like the comic relief of them or something. So I feel like my position in the group has taught me more about myself.

Several participants described the positive effects of finding communities of like-minded people on campus. Sarah, for instance, talked about the value of meeting people with similar political perspectives. She noted that she was raised in a liberal family in a conservative small town that was "not diverse in any manner" and described how coming to college allowed her to

interact with people who shared her liberal views. Other participants described the like-minded communities they had found on campus as having “the same identity” as themselves. These participants noted that the communities provide a safe environment where they could feel comfortable being themselves. Alex, for example, described the benefits of a safe friendship environment where he felt he could be his “true self.” He said,

I feel like with my best friend... we're very much, are like, the same identity... which makes it very easy, cause we know exactly where we're coming from, um, in terms of we're both from the [same area of the city], we both went to Catholic school, both, you know, Black and gay, um, like, stayed together freshman year, so I feel like... we can be completely ourselves and have, like, Black shorthand and gay shorthand... kind of firing on all cylinders and not feeling like you have to do anything you wouldn't want to do.

Of the 13 participants I interviewed for this study, five identify as Muslim women, and four of them live in adjacent apartments on campus. All four of the women's parents immigrated to the United States before their children were born; two participants' parents emigrated from Syria, one from Bangladesh, and one from India. Although their families' cultures differ from one another based on their countries of origin, the four women have developed a strong bond to one another due to their shared experiences as Muslim women in the U.S. Ayesha noted,

So I have roommates I'm very close to... I guess that kind of, they influence me a lot, especially 'cause we're all part of [the Muslim student organization] so we can relate to each other in certain aspects, but then like, we're all kind of different ethnicities. Like, I'm Syrian, my friend is Indian, my other friend's Bengali... we're different, but we're also very similar at the same time.

Like Alex's relationship with his best friend, these women's friendships with other women with similar identities and experiences have been highly valuable for them. Miah described the differences between the relationships she had with friends in high school compared to the friends she has made on campus and the positive influence her campus friends have been for her. She stated,

I had kind of a smaller friend group in high school, not like small as in, like, numbers, just connection-wise. You saw each other during the school day and you kind of just went home and it was fine. But here I have three roommates; I live in a four-bedroom apartment, and then across the hall there's another four-bedroom apartment with another four of my friends, so it's a total of eight girls...we've known each other since freshman year at this point and we're really, really close, and we're a huge influence on each other's lives. And I think them being on campus is what pushes me to do a lot of what I do and like, be involved in certain things and choose not to participate in other things. And they're just a very strong foundation. And, they're the type of people who will yell at you if you don't concentrate on school and starting to, like, waiver and stuff like that. It's a great support system.

One of Miah's roommates, Rachael, also talked about the closeness and influence of this friend group. She said,

I have three roommates and then four other girls live down the hall from me, and we're all really close with each other. They...they shape my life a lot. We're with each other 24/7 so, um, it's a funny little dynamic that we have because there's eight of us in the friend group, but we're all super close, we know everything about each other and...they definitely have the biggest impact on my life.

All five participants in this study who identify as Muslim are active in the university's official Muslim students' group and three of them hold executive positions within the organization. As with the women who have created a safe, familiar community for themselves through their living arrangements, participants noted that the relationships they have developed through participation in the Muslim student group have helped to strengthen their Muslim identities and have helped create an overall positive experience for them on campus. Ayesha described her friends in the group as her family, and Miah talked about the supportive environment she had found through her involvement with the organization. She said,

[The Muslim students' group] just kind of became a safe space after a while...they're just like, they're a very solid community...it's like a family. Everyone will put aside everything, if you're like, lost in the middle of nowhere, someone will come pick you up. If you need food, someone will help you. If you're sick, someone will check up on you. There's no way you're invisible in that organization. Someone is watching out for you.

As outlined in this section, social relationships in college have been influential in shaping how participants think about and understand themselves, including relationships with individuals who come from both different and similar backgrounds. Although interactions with students from different backgrounds were also valuable to them, the relationships they had developed with people who share dimensions of their identities were key in creating safe, positive environments for them on campus. These relationships also helped to strengthen particular dimensions of identities, such as with the Muslim women's' involvement in the Muslim student organization. Educational experiences also helped to strengthened participants' identities or helped participants to consider dimensions of their identities in new ways.

*Educational Experiences.* Participants also described the ways in which their educational experiences have influenced them, and particularly, how these experiences have shaped how they understand their social identities. Coursework on race, inequality, and social justice was a major theme that emerged when participants recounted educational experiences that had made a difference in how they understand themselves. Coursework in these areas caused them to become not only more aware of the issues addressed in the course material, but also more aware of themselves. Alex, for example, speaking broadly about his experience, said,

So I took [a social work class], which is like diversity, identity issues, and then another class...I think it all kind of pushed me to like, really evolve [my knowledge of social justice].

Katie specifically talked about how a course on race and ethnicity helped her to understand her position of privilege as a White, middle-class woman. She said the class made her consider that the way she had been raised to think about race and diversity – through a “colorblind” lens – was “a very privileged way to teach someone.” She described noticing different treatment of individuals from lower socioeconomic status in high school, particularly how students were placed in different academic tracks. Although she had noticed these differences previously, she did not really consider the larger social implications of inequality until she attended the race and ethnicity course. One reason for this deeper understanding was the timing; she was enrolled in the course in the wake of protests of police brutality following the killing of an unarmed African American teenager by a White police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. The protests in Ferguson and elsewhere in the U.S. during this time, as well as the larger Black Lives Matter movement, brought attention to a perennial problem (i.e., state sanctioned discrimination and brutality against people of color) and forced some, particularly

younger individuals who had never confronted the issue previously, to do so. This was indeed the case for Katie. Watching the protests unfold forced her to consider social inequality, specifically, the treatment of African Americans by law enforcement, which brought her attention to other social and political issues.

Three participants reported that studying abroad had a significant impact on their identities how they understand themselves. Leslie, for example, talked about how her study abroad experience influenced her coming out as bisexual. She said,

I did a study abroad program in Denmark and Sweden talking about gender in sociology and all that, um, and that was my first experience of really meeting other queer women...up until then all of my gay friends were guys. So that, for me, it was an experience to say like, I can still identify as this, and be a woman, and be feminine and do all this and that. And also studying abroad is like, you just learn so much more about the world and yourself and you meet cool people. And so I'd say that was like a big turning point for me in that aspect.

Alex described his experience studying abroad in England as having a major influence on how he thinks about himself as an "American."<sup>7</sup> He said,

Like...we pay for our own stuff. We, you know, if there's a failure, it's on you. Where, you know, it was very much a lot more communal a lot of other places that I went. Um, like you buy a whole round for other people or...there's lots of little things that just make us a very, a different society. A lot more individualistic, um, independent, and that's definitely, I feel like, a part of me, of who I am.

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<sup>7</sup> I use "American" instead of more inclusive language such as "citizen of the United States" because Alex, as well as most other participants in the study, used "American" to describe themselves.

He went on to talk about how this experience encouraged him to reflect on himself and his beliefs, saying,

I kinda always had a diverse kind of, group of friends, but everyone was kind of like, it was always like an *American* at the end of it, you know? Like it was African American, White American, Asian American, everyone—but it was still American. And it was very like an American context...I think unwrapping that was really interesting for me. And caused a lot of growth. It made me really, like, evaluate *my* beliefs and how much of that is just from what I've kind of been fed my whole life, or how much of it is really what I believe.

Zhang, the only participant in this study who is an international student, talked about his experience as a student studying abroad in the U.S. He said,

[In the United States] I have more freedom in regards to expressing myself. And also being exposed to more diverse political views in this country in comparison to China. That has hugely shaped me.

As described in this section, participants noted that aspects of their college experiences, particularly, transitioning from home to college, relationships on campus, and various educational experiences, have been influential in shaping them in some way. Transitioning from home to college and building relationships on campus helped to strengthen or affirm aspects of their individual identities, such as determination and independence. Educational experiences, however, were more influential in shaping participants' social identities. Coursework on social justice and studying abroad, particularly, encouraged them to consider their social identities in new ways. Katie, for example, confronted her position of privilege as a White woman, Leslie embraced her bisexual identity, and Alex and Zhang reflected on their nationalities. These

examples indicate that educational experiences challenged participants to think differently, and often more critically, about themselves and their social identities. Political and social influences caused participants to further think about and develop their social identities.

**Political and Social Influences.** Participants described political and social events that not only have influenced how they think about themselves and their identities, but also the ways in which these events have shifted their academic and career goals. The three themes that emerged in participants' discussions of political and social influences were (a) the 2016 presidential election, (b) discrimination on campus, and (c) media influences.

*The 2016 presidential election.* Most of the participants I interviewed for this study talked about how the 2016 presidential election, which occurred during their facilitator training, affected them and how they think about their identities. All of the participants I interviewed are politically left leaning, and the shock and sadness that resulted from Donald Trump's victory over Hillary Clinton was still palpable when I interviewed them some eight months after the election. Several students described their immediate reactions to the election and how they continue to process this event. Alex, for example, spoke about his sadness in the days after, saying, "I literally went around, sad. I was cry[ing]—just sad. I was literally, like, for a month. I couldn't shake, like, the sadness." Leslie likewise described the sadness she felt after the election, saying, "The day after the election I was stuck to my couch, just, like, sobbing. Could not get up. Could not function. That was very dark. It was a very dark time. I know it was a dark time for a lot of people."

In addition to the initial shock of Donald Trump being elected, participants also described the lingering effects of this event. For example, at the time of our interview, Alex was preparing to return to England, where he had studied abroad, to begin a master's program. He described

conversations he had had with people about Donald Trump during his previous time in England and predicted that he would have to “explain America” and Trump to people there when he returned. He said,

I ran into other Americans and they said the exact same thing. Um, every person I would meet, it'd be like, “Oh you're an American! That's so great! What do you think about Trump?” It was the second question. Every time. Literally without fail. Maybe the third. So all the sudden now I'm like, “it's gonna be...it's gonna be a rough year explaining America to other people!”

He noted that even still, at the time of our interview, he had difficulty processing the reality of a Trump presidency. He talked about being a fan of *Late Night with Seth Meyers* and the show's regular political segment “A Closer Look,” which often highlights stories from the day's news regarding President Trump and members of his family and administration. Alex described watching the segments and “dying laughing,” but, “then, like, after the video ends, you realize like, oh wait. This is *actually* happening.”

Despite the shock and lingering anxiety participants reported experiencing after the presidential election, some described the positive impact that the election had on them. Rachael, a political science major, described how the presidential election reinforced her interests in politics and social structures. Her political science coursework aligned with the presidential campaign, and learning about the election process while watching it unfold deepened her desire to study and pursue a career focused on social and political issues. Zhang, who is from China and came to the U.S. for college, described his reaction to the election and how it has made him think differently about the United States. He talked about how gaining new perspective on the political

views of Americans – not only those with which he agrees and not just those on campus – encouraged him to be more active in seeking other views and opinions. He said,

I think [the election] has made me...look at this country very differently. I think in the beginning I was all just taking in, uh, agreeing with most of the things that I have seen, and now there's more controversy and argument and discussion, I see different views and I kind of stepped away from this context and I felt that...what I have been receiving in college...the education, I'm talking about, is partial. It doesn't represent this country. And it shouldn't be who I am because I need to learn more. I think that happened to me after the election.

Zhang went on to describe how his views on hearing different perspectives shifted in his senior year. He said,

I would say in my junior year I was more of a liberal kid and in the workshop, I was maybe unconsciously shutting down those more conservative views. But when I'm back as a senior, after the election...I cared a lot more about students who had different views. Who had non-popular, quote-unquote, non-popular political views. And I could see where they are coming from. Now I have a roommate who's from Ohio and he's very conservative so we talk a lot and exchange opinions. That has been very enriching to me.

The Muslim women I interviewed noted not only becoming more aware of their Muslim identities after the election, but they also described developing a stronger sense of pride associated with being Muslim. Aneesa, a Muslim woman born in the U.S. and whose parents emigrated from India, described how Trump's election affected her compared to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, which occurred when she was five years old. On the effects of 9/11 on her Muslim identity, she said,

I feel like when I was a kid, [being Muslim] was more of a home thing, like I would experience it at home. I saw, like, my parents praying or something like that. Um, and it was something I identified myself with as well, but I just thought that it wasn't something that would ever come up in like a school setting, anything like that. But then I started growing up, and after, like, 9/11, I kept hearing stuff about my religion. I was just like, this is weird 'cause everybody's like, hating on us, kind of. So for a while I was just not understanding because everything I was hearing from the media didn't match up with what I was learning at home, so I was just confused, kind of, when I was kid.

She went on to describe the different way that Trump's election has influenced her Muslim identity. She stated,

I think recently with the Trump election I feel like [being Muslim has] come up a lot more recently, but I've approached it differently than I did when I was a kid with 9/11. So I feel like I'm more confident with it, and it's made me understand that, I feel like, rather than getting angry with people I approach it a way that, maybe they grew up in a different environment, they have a reason for how they think, and it's kind of my job to, like, have an experience with them that might change their mind in the future.

All participants in the study discussed the presidential election and how it affected them, and all of them reported being either shocked, saddened, or disappointed by the outcome.

Despite these negative reactions, participants also described positive effects of the election, such as Aneesa thinking about her Muslim identity differently than when she was a child and Zhang becoming more willing to engage with new perspectives. The election forced participants to consider themselves and their identities in a new context (i.e., a Trump presidency), and these examples suggest that they have developed the fortitude and maturity necessary to manage

difficult or disappointing events in constructive ways. Evidence of this participants' development was also present when they described how acts of discrimination and intolerance on campus had influenced them and their identities.

***Discrimination on campus.*** Several participants described how acts of discrimination on campus shaped how they understand themselves, particularly acts that were directed at students with whom they share social identities. Benjamin, for example, described an event in which derogatory and discriminatory phrases directed at Latinx students, such as “deport them all,” were written in chalk on campus sidewalks. He also described a fraternity party on campus that promoted stereotypical images of individuals of Mexican heritage and the groups that he felt were the source of much of the discrimination against Latinx students like himself, noting, “mostly the things that impact us are either things that are either done by Greek life or the Republicans on campus.” He went on to talk specifically about how these incidents on campus affected him. He said,

I've been through a lot of things in my life, so I try not to let [acts of discrimination] affect my school work. But, it definitely, you kind of take a moment, and you're like, “should I keep being at this university? Should I transfer?” And then I know in Latino studies, like sometimes we'll have like, breaks, where we can go and have snacks and stuff. And a lot of people will cry and things like that. So, um, I know a lot of times it is kind of an emotional release that's needed. Or when I was [facilitating workshops], I saw myself getting more, not aggressive, but more like, “I'm not gonna take your bullshit if you want to argue with me about my humanity.”

Like Benjamin, three of the Muslim women I interviewed described an act of discrimination on campus. The women recounted an incident in which an individual pulled off a

woman's hijab while on a campus bus. The women talked about how this event made them both more aware and prouder of their Muslim identity. For example, one of the women, Ayesha, talked about how the incident affected her. She said,

One of my good friends...was on the bus, like the bus that I take every single day...go to class and come back. She was on the bus and someone ripped her scarf off. Like, here on campus. And so that was very eye-opening, just because there are people out there like that. But it also kind of made me, so I was more aware of that...but then a lot of other people who are very supportive on campus as well and who are there for you and it kind of made me...strengthen. Like, I found myself strengthening my identity as well because, like, this is who I am and I'm not gonna let anybody change that and think differently because of that.

Acts of discrimination and intolerance on campus, particularly those aimed at individuals who share their social identities, caused participants to be more aware of these dimensions of their identities. These experiences could indeed be difficult for participants to process, but as evidenced by the examples in this section, participants' identities were often strengthened after being confronted with discrimination. Participants' identities were further developed and strengthened as a result of media influences.

**Media influences.** Several participants talked about how images in the media in the last few years (including entertainment, news, and social media) have influenced how they think about themselves. Aneesa, for example, described how images of Muslims in the media have increased her awareness of her Muslim identity. She said,

I think it affects the way I think and the way I go about things. But also just, with the media recently, I feel like, it's the first thing people assume and see when they hear my name or even see the color of my skin, so. I think it's something I'm conscious of a lot.

Anne, who also identifies as a Muslim woman, described a similar experience. She talked about the overall climate for Muslims in the United States in the last few years and how she tries to understand negative attitudes toward Muslim people. She noted,

I think seeing this past few years...how our culture has shifted in terms of fear, just xenophobia, things like that. Seeing how, you know, being Muslim and how people have treated my family in certain situations and really just seeing, trying to understand maybe that it isn't really out of hatred but out of fear, and how to cope with it.

Two participants, Alicia and Benjamin, described depictions in the media of people with whom they share identities after Trump's election and how they try to avoid being negatively affected by them. Alicia noted that she tries to not let images in the media shape how she sees herself because, "a lot of things that are shown on media is just stereotypes and depictions of what people think of other people." Benjamin, who identifies as a transgender male, discussed how he deals with negative images of transgender individuals in the media. He talked about how difficult it is to completely block such images, particularly now that Trump is president, saying,

I try not to listen to the radio too much. Um, they say a lot of transphobic or like, crazy stuff that's uncalled for. Um, so I'm also like on Pandora, or when I go on Facebook I edit all my [Trump-supporting] friends. So, it's like, I try to just have all my social media be neutral, but obviously it's very hard, you know, you'll go somewhere and you'll see something you don't like. Um, especially with the person who's in office right now. Um, he can say things are kind of like, "why would you say that? You're an idiot?" So that's,

it's definitely frustrating, but I just kind of ignore it and act like we don't have a president right now. So that helps.

Where Benjamin talked about trying to ignore negative images in media (and, as he suggested, the very existence of a Trump presidency), Alonzo described making a conscious effort to become more informed after the election. He talked about how listening to the progressive podcast *Democracy Now!* has become a regular feature in his daily life. He said,

So for me it's like a routine. Before it was like, I don't have time for an hour, I need to study. But now it's, now that I include it in my routine I have like, I have to listen to it or I feel out of tune with the world. And for me, that's actually one of the biggest influences because once I started listening, I wouldn't say it radicalized me, but it made me very aware...I've had a couple friends and I'm like, "hey you should listen to this," and they'll listen and be like, "ok I need a breath real quick." Like, "this is a lot." And I'm like, "well, whether you like it or not it's going on in the world, so are you going to act on it or are you just gonna not listen?"

He talked more specifically about the influence that listening to the podcast has had on him, saying,

*Democracy Now!* has played a big role in my life and I try to do as best as I can with the little time that I have to donate here and there. I get emails like... "sign your name on this petition," I do whatever I can to help out the cause. And also, with the information I learn from *Democracy Now!* I've had, in [my service organization] we have separate committees, and I was on diversity last semester and I had a couple of workshops where I talked about the Syrian refugee crisis, um, I did veganism and climate change... topics

that I found that were very important and I felt like I needed to address and just get people thinking about.

Participants described how various media sources have influenced how they think about themselves and their identities. Participants also discussed how they deal with such images, whether they choose to ignore them completely or actively seek more information. The influence of media, along with the 2016 presidential election and acts of discrimination on campus, the other two themes that emerged when students talked about important social and political events that have shaped how they think about themselves, are only pieces of a lifetime of experiences that have contributed to forming and refining each participant's understanding of themselves.

As I have discussed in this section, How Identities are Shaped, participants described various relationships, both within their families and on campus, as well as significant events and experiences that have helped to shape who they are and how they understand themselves. Although this study was intended to focus on how participants understand their social identities, participants often described how they think about themselves outside of their social identities, particularly, aspects of their personality qualities and academic and career interests. In the next section, Multiple Dimensions of Identity, I describe findings related to how participants understand the multiple dimensions of their identities and how these dimensions function together to affect participants' lives.

### **Multiple Dimensions of Identity**

Before each interview, participants completed a brief questionnaire addressing how they identify across the six dimensions of identity referenced in Jones and McEwen's (2000) original Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity: gender, sexual orientation, religion, race, class, and culture. The interview protocol expanded on the questionnaire responses so that participants

could describe themselves beyond surface-level identification categories, providing insight into how participants came to identify as they do and which identities they feel are most significant to who they are. Discussions with participants revealed the ways in which the multiple dimensions of their identities exist and function in different contexts, as well as how they exist and function relative to one another. In this section, I describe the three themes that emerged related to the multiple dimensions of participants' identities: (1) Visibility of Identities, (2) Identities and Conflict, and (3) Linked Identities.

**Visibility of Identities.** Participants described how the visibility of their identities affects how salient those identities are to them. Alex, for example, noted that his identity as an African American is most salient to him because it is most visible to others. When I asked him to describe his most salient identity, he said,

I think being Black...and it's not even by real choice. It's like by necessity that it has become my salient identity. I think before, I did go to private school and all that stuff so it's a very non-Black environment, very White environment. Very like, different...And constantly like, hearing microaggressions and constantly putting, like, [being put] down and I felt really bad about myself, like, all the time, and didn't really know why. Um, and I think like learning that and coming into like, my identity as a Black person, and how that actually has affected my experience.

He went on to talk about how he is often reminded of his Black identity, saying,

I feel like every single day someone brings it up. Or you know, or it's like a joke or it's a whatever, a little thing. Like, you go around as a Black person it's kind of always put in your face that you are *this*. Or you are this minority, or you are this person. So, uh, learning to be ok with that and learning accept that, you know, the advantages and like,

the beauty of my culture and the people, um, was something that was important to me to know to be a happier person. To be ok with like, yeah. I am. Because people would, you know, say it anyway.

Alex's Black identity, which is visible, differs from his gay identity, which is more hidden. He noted,

[My Black identity is] super out there. Like, you know, I can talk to a lot of people, I don't go around being like, "oh I'm gay!" Like in your face, you know. It's definitely a huge part of me, it's part of my personality, my friend group and a lot of things I like... It's not something I like, say in like a professional setting, it's not something people see immediately, um, you have to actually ask or dig deep to say, you know, to find out that I'm interested in science or to find out, you know, I'm this or that, I'm from Chicago, all these kind of things that are definitely part of my identity, but um, are not as readily available and accessible.

Although some dimensions of participants' identities are visible, if not always accurately determined by others through phenotypic factors such as skin color, other aspects of identity are hidden. Several participants described how they make certain dimensions of their identities either visible or hidden depending on contextual factors. Several participants described how their clothing choices affect how easily other people recognize certain dimensions of their identities. They also talked about how they have come to make choices about when and where they allow these identities to become visible. Benjamin, for example, described places where he feels comfortable expressing his Latino and transgender identities. He talked about being politically outspoken, but only in certain settings. He described the conscious decisions he makes regarding

wearing t-shirts with political slogans on them, noting that some of the shirts he proudly wears on campus he would never wear in his rural hometown. He said,

So campus is definitely a bubble. Like I can wear more radical things when I'm on campus, especially depending on where I'm going. Like if I'm in [the Latinx cultural office] or if I'm in the [Latino studies] building or going to [Latino studies] classes, I'll wear like, "trans lives matter" or "make America brown again," and things like that, you know, like little things like that. Um, in [my hometown], you don't wear that. You definitely don't wear that. And I'm definitely hyperaware.

Just as Benjamin's clothing choices allow him to highlight aspects of his identity that are important to him, several of the Muslim women I interviewed discussed how their decision to wear or not wear a hijab allowed their Muslim identities to be either visible or hidden. Three of the five Muslim women I interviewed wear hijabs, and although each woman described different reasons for choosing to do so, two of them talked about how their decision was influenced by their desire to make their Muslim identities more visible. Rachael talked about how she is often the only woman who wears a hijab in many of her classes, saying, "I don't think I've ever had a class with another Muslim girl who wore hijab before" and noted that she is "always aware of that." She described the value she finds in being the only woman in her classes wearing a hijab, if not the only Muslim student, saying,

I like it, actually. It's weird 'cause, I stand out. My professors know who I am. By the first day they know my name or even um, for example, I took a class my freshman year and it was like a rather big class, and now I have, as a senior, I'm taking a small political science class and my professor remembers me from my freshman year because of my head scarf. So it's interesting 'cause I stand out and, um, I'm recognized more by my

professors and it makes me a, like, it's like a one-up on a lot of the other students who are just like another person in the bunch, you know?

Although standing out is a benefit of wearing the hijab for Rachael, she noted that this was not why she initially decided to practice this aspect of her religion. Rachael stated she began wearing the hijab “for the reasons why most people wear the hijab, not to stand out, but because I felt like it was right decision in my life at that point.” She noted, too, that choosing to wear a hijab, and thus being visibly identifiable as Muslim, also led to negative consequences for her, and that deciding to wear a hijab also meant developing a “thick skin” because of the discrimination associated with the practice. She said,

It's hard especially in our society right now and what's going on in the news and the backlash against Muslims, it's a very scary thing sometimes. Because people who don't even know you will shout things at you, call you a terrorist, like, even when I was kid that happened. I would walk down the street in my neighborhood and people would roll down their window and tell us to go back to our country. It's been happening to me since I was like seven, from what I can remember. So it's something that I've grown up with.

Rachael's discussion of the positive and negative aspects of wearing a hijab was similar to Miah's. Miah also described discrimination she had experienced because of her visible Muslim identity, saying, “it's not like I can just walk through the streets and nothing will ever happen. You always get people yelling at you.” She talked about her decision to wear the hijab and noted that her parents would prefer that she did not because of the potential for discrimination or violence against her if she is visibly identifiable as Muslim. Though she said she understands their concern, he also noted that she wanted her Muslim identity to be visible because it is such an important aspect of her life. She said,

I do see it as a religious thing, but it's also kind of like a, because of like, the whole stigma against Muslims, by putting it on, I was kind of just like, I kind of want the world to know that I'm Muslim. And I know that I'll get hate for it, but...I just want people to know it's not something I'm ashamed of.

Like Rachael, Miah also talked about how she was often the only woman wearing a hijab in her classes. Unlike Rachael, however, Miah reported not particularly enjoying being visibly different in this way. Speaking of an instance in which she was the only woman at a club meeting wearing a hijab, she said,

I just kept thinking in my head, I was like, even if I can't change my skin color, I really wish I wasn't wearing a scarf right now, just so I could blend in a little bit more. And like, had I had the option, then I probably wouldn't have told them I was Muslim for a long time.

Miah's choice to wear the hijab makes her Muslim identity visible, which she reported as sometimes being a source of anxiety for her. Similarly, Aneesa, one of the two women I interviewed who identify as Muslim but do not wear hijabs, talked about how keeping her Muslim identity somewhat hidden by not wearing the hijab allowed her the freedom to choose whether she identifies as Muslim. Further, she said, because her family is from India and she does not wear a hijab, many people assume she is Hindu. She described how she makes the decision to share her Muslim identity, saying,

Um, most of the time I just go for it and hope that it's ok? But every now and then if I see like, I don't know, someone's wearing a Trump hat or something like that or, I've known that they're very vocal about certain views that I might just walk away. Might be safer for me not to mention [that I'm Muslim].

Alonzo noted that changing an aspect of his physical appearance, specifically, his hair, allowed him to make his African heritage visible. He described how his ethnicity is often misidentified by others, saying,

So my dad's Ecuadorian and mom's Dominican, so there's no Mexican in there. And all my life people ask me, like, "what's your ethnicity or race or whatever", and, or they'll say like, I guess most people assume that I'm Mexican and people who don't will ask me, and when I tell them I'm not Mexican they'll be like, "so you're Puerto Rican." Like, no. After like, once it's Mexican, then it goes to Puerto Rico, it's the same pattern every time. After Puerto Rico they're just like, "wait, I don't know what else there is." I'm just like, there's a lot more countries in South America, but it's fine. I actually had someone who thought I was Muslim, which is interesting. But um, I think most people think I'm Mexican.

He went on to talk about the effects of this misidentification and how his hair helps him identify as both Latino and Black, saying,

I consider myself Afro-Latino. So now, like, whenever I get those options, I get mad when it's only one option or the other. Like, there's no way you can just limit someone to just one. So I think the most obvious would be, um, Hispanic and Latino, but...since I started growing out my hair, the curls are really curly, so I want people to realize that I'm also Black as well.

Another way that participants described making aspects of their identities visible to others is through their names. Two of the 13 participants, Alicia and Zhang, talked about how their names were important in how they identify themselves. Alicia, who identifies as Nigerian

American, goes by her Nigerian middle name. She described how people often mistook her for Latina because of her first name. She said,

Yeah, when I was in high school people thought I was, like...Hispanic. Because of my name [Alicia], which is my first name. And so, um, people usually called me [Alicia] in high school because they didn't know [my Nigerian middle name] And I actually went, um, was called that, and so they thought I was Hispanic and from like, a Latin country. But they didn't know where. And so when I told them I'm African they were like, "what"? I'm like, "yeah".

Because her Nigerian heritage is such an important aspect of her identity, she prefers her middle name, and will often correct teachers who call her by her first name.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Zhang prefers to use his Chinese name because it makes his Chinese identity visible. He noted that when he first moved to the U.S., he used an English name so that he would blend in more with American culture. Using his English name, however, caused anxiety for him because doing so concealed an important aspect of his identity. He stated,

I was struggling a lot with my name in the first two years. I had an English name...I was using that, trying to kind of fit in, trying to pretend that I'm no different from any other kid in the classroom...that was my intrinsic motivation to blend into this culture. I wanted to be cosmopolitan, I wanted to be unrecognizable, a culturally unrecognizable person on this campus. I wanted to be everything. So I felt having a more generic English name would help me in being that. And that had a conflict with my cultural identity, which I didn't know how to appreciate in the beginning of my college career.

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Alicia told me to use her first name, or a variation thereof, instead of a Nigerian name. Although this is somewhat surprising given how important her Nigerian heritage is to her, it is possible that she preferred I use her first name for the sake of anonymity.

He continued,

And then, gradually, when I started working for the psychology department as an advisor I realized that having a Chinese name helps you help other Chinese [students] identify you. So they can come to you for resources and that make you a more direct, more helpful person in the department. So I switched back to my Chinese name, um, started using my Chinese name in class and challenged professors and other classmates to use my original name. So I think that conflict kind of made me decide to just, you know, ditch that, kind of pretentious English name and be more accepting about my difference.

Participants described how the visibility of a dimension of their identity determined the salience of that aspect of themselves. The examples provided by participants, including clothing choices, altering an aspect of physical appearance, or using names tied to ethnic, racial, or national heritage, make visible or hide dimensions of identity that participants want to highlight or conceal. Participants' desire to hide aspects of their identities, such as Miah not wanting to stand out as the only Muslim person in a group, indicates that individuals may experience anxiety or conflict because of their identities. Participants discussed this potential for anxiety and the circumstances in which they experienced conflict related to one or more dimensions of their identities.

**Identities and Conflict.** Participants reported that dimensions of their identities could sometimes be sources of anxiety or stress for them, which can affect their relationships with others and how they understand themselves. One theme that emerged related to identities and conflict was the difficulty of reconciling U.S. identity and family cultural background. Eight of the 13 participants I interviewed for this study are children of immigrant parents, and many of them described experiencing conflict related to blending their identities associated with parents'

countries of origin and their identities as U.S. citizens. Ayesha, for example, speaking broadly about her experience, said,

My parents are immigrants and I'm American, like I was raised that kind of way. So I've taken from American culture but I've also like, taken from Arab culture. And sometimes the two don't really, like, cultures are different...like something I take from American culture where it wouldn't be like that practiced, like overseas but then something I'd practice as an Arab, people don't do it here.

Two of the participants, Alonzo and Alicia, talked specifically about how their African heritage conflicted with their identities as Black Americans. Alonzo, whose mother is Dominican, talked about the conflict between Dominican and African cultures. He described not personally experiencing this particular conflict because he lives in the United States, suggesting that his American identity forces him to recognize his African heritage. He said,

I know Dominican culture is very, they do not take any kind of pride in their African history. Even though they're right next to Haiti...I know a lot of Dominicans from the homeland, they do not. Like, they'll say, "I'm Dominican, I'm Spanish, I'm anything but African." And me in America, I'm like, I'm both.

Alicia, whose parents are from Nigeria, talked about conflict related to being both African and African American. She said,

There's always a debate between like, African American and then African. And like, it's just, it's funny to me because at the end of the day when someone else looks at us we're gonna be seen as all Black. At the end of the day. So like, there's always like, there's been a conflict with like, "oh, what do you really identify with since you were born in America but your parents are Nigerian?"

Several participants also described conflicts that exist between their religious identities and other identity dimensions. Alex, for example, discussed the conflict he encountered with reconciling his religious identity as Christian and his sexual identity as a gay man. He attended Catholic middle and high schools, and in college, he was active in Christian fellowship groups. He talked about how important his faith is to him because it allows him to be a part of a supportive community, yet he is often conflicted about religious teachings regarding homosexuality. He noted struggling with maintaining his faith while maintaining his identity as a gay man, and particularly, how he practices his religion. He said,

Being Christian and being gay has been a *huge* conflict... That's something I'm still actively trying to like... see how that like will affect me, or where I wanna be and like, what my faith is, and what, like how do I practice that or how don't I. So it's been like kind of an up and down relationship. Sometimes I'm really, really into it and I'm really, really faithful, and I'm going to church and Bible study and... there's a couple years of college that I was like doing something with my fellowship like almost every day. Or every other day. And there was like another year where I kinda hit more of a rough spot because I was just like, actively looking at it. Like my fellowship ended up... like, the bigger organization came out in the stance of like, "oh we still affirm that... being homosexual is a sin, and x, y, and z, and if our workers don't agree with us, they basically can leave" or whatever. Like, and so, that put me in a very hard place. Like, how do I stay in this organization? They, yes, people are accepting or not, like openly hateful, but it's, like, if you're hypocritical... that's definitely been a huge conflict.

Two participants, Miah and Rachael, described how their religious identities have caused conflicts in their relationships with others on campus. Miah talked about how her identity as a

Muslim woman was often seen by others as incompatible with being American. She recalled students in high school asking her how she could be Muslim while also being “so strongly American,” and noted that she often feels pressure to explain to others on campus how she is both Muslim and American. In addition to the frustration caused by having to justify simultaneously identifying in two ways that other students may perceive as incompatible, she also described how her religion affects her social relationships on campus, saying,

I don't really drink. I don't really go out or anything. Like I do go out, but like, not as like, a typical college student would, probably. And so that has a lot of conflict with my social life. Because a lot of people, they'll be like, “oh we just finished this project, let's go get a drink!” And I'm like, “I'll go with you, but I'm gonna be drinking water or lemonade or something.” That, that's like a little hard here.

Rachael also talked about the conflict between her Muslim identity and her identity as a college student and described the boundaries she has set for herself in order to maintain her religious practice while participating in social activities on campus. She stated,

Like, some, some women who wear the scarf choose to be very, more like, conservative or like, introverted, and don't partake in certain things, and some women choose to wear the scarf and do a lot of things that, and I'm like in the balance, you know? I still go to concerts, I still go to music festivals, I still have fun with my friends, I go to parties. But like, I know the limits. And I know how far I want to push myself, you know. I'm not going to like, partake in certain activities that I know are against my religion but I still like to have fun. You have to have the balance and you know your own limits personally. Like you can choose how far you want to go 'cause you know what's right and what's

wrong. So I know, like, what I can and cannot do. And I know the black and the white and the grey.

Several participants noted the conflicts they experienced because of their sexual identities. Two of the participants, Alex and Leslie, talked about how their sexual identities caused conflict within their family relationships. Alex described having a close relationship with his father, but also described how his identity as a gay man was a source of conflict in this relationship. He said,

[I go to] my dad. For a lot. I mean, not like, gay stuff...that sounds so funny. But like anything dealing my gay identity I *don't* go to him because that's been a huge source of, like, I think that's pretty much the only, like, hiccup in our relationship. Because again, he's a very faithful man, very Christian man, very traditional, and in that sense, um, he still loves me and everything and he supports me and all this kind of stuff, but that's just something we don't talk about. It's very, you know, taboo. It's the elephant in the room.

Leslie, who identifies as bisexual, also talked about how her relationship with her family is affected by her sexual identity. Though she described having a close relationship with her mother and brother, she noted,

I'm still not out to all of my family just because I know where they stand with regards to being gay and being queer and saying words like that. Like it, they, the dinner table would be flipped if, you know, I brought it up. Um, but I do have some support from my family. So my mom is recently become supportive of me.

Leslie also described the internal conflict that she had experienced related to her sexual identity, saying,

I think sometimes I feel like my, the struggles that I've had in like coming out to people, and like the self-hate that I've dealt with coming out and being queer, often affects my mental health status, which often goes under ability status. So I also have depression and anxiety. I've seen treatment for it, gone to therapy and all of that. And a lot of it stems back to my issues of myself kind of saying, no, this is not a part of you, um, this is bad, you know. Your family's not going to like you, your friends aren't going to like you because of this. So I think those two definitely relate to each other. I don't know if it's because one happens because of the other, like I think I've always had anxiety issues in my life, but I think my coming out situation, um, has definitely grown the anxiety and the depressive episodes.

Alex also noted conflicts between his sexual identity and his racial identity. He talked about the importance of images of gay men in movies and television, and how he feels these depictions affect people's perceptions of gay men, particularly gay Black men. He said,

I mean, definitely being gay and Black [is a conflict]...I think that's why *Moonlight* was such a big deal. I mean, [homophobia is] even worse in like the Black community. It's so much more. I feel like homophobia, um, just kind of how it's set up? Like it's, you know, even harder rejected. 'Cause there is this focus on hyper-masculinity, um, in the community, so I think that was definitely like a big conflict.

The movie Alex referred to, *Moonlight*, centers around an African American male protagonist who struggles to reconcile his gay identity with his African American identity. Alex talked about how this image was so important because it contrasted with typical representation of gay men in movies and television, particularly on television shows such *Will & Grace*, which features two

gay male characters who are cisgender and White. He said this false representation often caused him to receive comments from peers that he could not be both Black and gay.

Although Leslie and Alex both described the difficulties they had experienced due to their sexual identities, they both also described how other dimensions of their identities provide them with social privilege. Leslie, for example, described how her identity as a White woman provided her social privilege while her bisexual identity simultaneously has exposed her to oppression. She described the frustration of being in conversations in which she felt that the oppression she had experienced because of her sexual identity was discounted because of the privilege she holds as a White woman. She said,

So I think there's a balance of talking about, like, yes, I am privileged being a White woman, but then I'm also not privileged because I'm queer. Or, um, you know, in conversations like that it's often like, "ok you're White, so shut up." But it's like, I still have something to bring to the table. I still want to listen to other people's ideas and opinions and experiences, but it's often like, I have to justify myself in these conversations and say, when people look at me they don't know that I'm bi, so then it's almost like I have to say, "but I'm bi! I've experienced oppression as well." But I don't like those conversations.

She continued,

Sometimes when I'm in conversations about social justice my opinions or my words are often pushed aside, even when I am trying to be as inclusive as I can. It's often like, "ok, we have the White opinion already, let's go to someone else." And it's, I see where that is important but I also feel that it could be damaging to many people. So I think sometimes that happens and I think it really does push White people out of these conversations even

when you are a White person in a marginalized identity. Like there still needs to be a space for White people who are marginalized in society as well as non-White people who are marginalized in society.

While Leslie noted understanding that her visible racial identity provided her privilege, Alex described how an invisible identity, his middle-class status, allowed him social privilege that people of color from lower socioeconomic status may not experience. He suggested that his class status may have shielded him from experiencing more racism than he was exposed to. He said,

Like, I never had to worry about money my whole life. And I also recognize that I received and experienced a lot less racism in my life because of my class. Because like, my class put me in a place, in a neighborhood that the racism was like, overt, but I still had lots of opportunities...to do stuff and to be here and to learn and have the tutor and all that kind of stuff. Where a lot of people, especially if you're not, if your class is lower...and if you're a person of color, you completely get, you know, put out of that equation. So it's not like, "oh, I'm Black, I'm like...I'm so underprivileged in every single area."

As evidenced by the examples in this section, dimensions of identity can conflict with one another, such as Alex's difficulties in reconciling his religious (Catholic) identity with his racial (Black) identity, or they can be sources of anxiety in other ways, as with Leslie's bisexual identity causing friction between her and her family. Further, because dimensions of identity are overlapping, they can conflict with one another in multiple ways. For example, sexual identity can conflict with racial identity, cultural identity, religious identity, or any combination of these

or other dimensions, or they may not conflict at all. However, dimensions of identity do not necessarily have to conflict, and some may be intrinsically linked to one another.

**Linked identities.** Participants described the ways in which various dimensions of their identities are connected. The Muslim women I interviewed for this study described how their Muslim identities are closely tied to other dimensions of their identities. Several Muslim women talked about how their religious and gender identities cannot be separated because their notion of how to be a woman comes from their faith. Rachael, for example, said,

I think...being a Muslim woman...it's like the biggest thing that, kind of, that coexist. And a lot of people don't understand what I mean by that. It's just because, being a woman in Islam you have so many rights, which people don't even know about. You have so many rights that other religions don't even give to women. And I love being a woman in Islam because you read the stories and you read the religious texts that we have and you know how much women are respected in our religion. So that something that I love.

Ayesha also talked about how her rights as a woman are closely tied to her religion, saying,

I can say my identity as woman and my identity as a Muslim. Because, um, a lot of things I feel like as my right as a woman is kind of implemented in my faith as well. And I feel like a lot of times when I say like, I have these rights, I kind of use my Islamic background or the principles that are practiced to kind of back that up in a way. And then same thing like, uh, oh like, if I'm practicing Islam then I have these rights as a woman to be involved in it. So it's like, hard to say what one without the other just because I feel like all of my identities are interconnected in a way.

Two of the women talked about how their family's cultural background and their religious identities are closely connected. Miah, for example, said,

I think the fact that I'm Bengali and Muslim, I think they kind of go hand in hand. Um, because Bangladesh is like a Muslim-majority country so it has a lot to do with the culture and stuff like that. And the culture and religion get a little bit mixed up. Like, my parents will make up rules out of nowhere and be like, "that's part of the religion!" And "I'm like, no it's not! You're just saying that 'cause that's what your parents did!" So that I think is very heavily interlinked. Whenever I think of my culture, my religion is immediately there, when I think of my religion, culture is immediately there. They're very interlinked.

Aneesa also described how her family's Indian culture is closely tied to her religion. She stated, I see a lot of similarities between, like, Indian culture and like, what I'm supposed to do with my religion. I think also because my family kind of meshed the two, so kind of, myself, just, meshed the two, too. Sometimes I forget which one is a religious culture thing and which one is my Indian culture.

Like the Muslim women in the study, Benjamin also described how his religious identity is connected to his family's culture. He identifies as Catholic, but he talked about how the Catholicism he practices is heavily influenced by his grandmother's practice of Santeria. He said, So it's kind of like, being Latino, you get colonized so you're Catholic, but also...the Catholic religion is very, like I wear my cross and things like that, so it's something that everyone can kind of identify with, but, also like, I do certain things that Catholics don't do religiously...there's certain things like fortune telling, the Tarot cards and things like that. There's also spiritual cleansings, like practices that my grandma does that like

cleanse us and cleanse the homes and things like that, and Catholics don't do that. Um, and also I don't pray to saints like Catholics do. Um, there's certain, like, I guess deities, that, Santeria, like, people like praise, and other than that I'll like, pray to Jesus or Mary but I don't believe in saints or anything like that.

Other participants in the study who identify as female discussed how their gender identities are closely connected to other dimensions of their identities. Katie, for example, talked about the connection between her gender and racial identities. She acknowledged that her perception of what it means to be a woman could only be seen in connection to her experience as someone who identifies as White. She said,

It's like, the only way I know to be a woman is to be a White woman. I don't know what it is to be any other type of woman. And so, I think just inherently it's hard for me to separate it. So as I read about other types of feminism and what that means, and other types of experiences, and the more I hear about it, you know, the more experiences I have, you know, deep down, I know I only know my experiences.

Alicia, who similarly described how her perception of being a woman is connected to her Nigerian identity, spoke more specifically about the aspects of her Nigerian identity that were tied to her gender. She talked about how the way that she understands being a woman is closely connected to her family's Nigerian cultural influence, saying,

I think being a woman and being Nigerian is very hard to separate because there's, like, when it comes to culture, women are perceived a certain way and have to do things that men don't have to do so I think they're very interlocked... So like, when it comes to chores, or even upbringing, we're just raised differently from our brothers. Our brothers are allowed to go out and do whatever they want, and for females, you're expected to do the total

opposite, and you have to cook, and you have to learn how to um, like they're prepping you for marriage, pretty much, to be a fit wife, but their main focus is school and then marriage.

Just as dimensions of identity can conflict with one another in multiple ways and depend greatly on the individual and on context, identity dimensions can also be linked or connected in multiple ways. As described throughout this section, various dimensions of identities affect how participants interact with others and how they understand themselves. Participants noted that the visibility of identities determines the salience of those dimensions, and several described the ways in which they make visible or hidden different dimensions in particular contexts. Participants also discussed how dimensions of their identities can conflict with one another or be sources of anxiety and how dimensions may be connected. The examples participants provided highlight the complex, contextual nature of social identities.

Most of the descriptions of participants' understanding of their identities in this section, Multiple Dimensions of Identity, are largely related to participants' experiences in social settings, with their families, and in other areas of their lives. In the next section, Identity and Facilitation, I discuss the ways in which the multiple dimensions of participants' identities function within the context of the diversity workshops they facilitate.

### **Identity and Facilitation**

As outlined in the previous section, participants described various ways in which the multiple dimensions of their identities influence how they understand themselves and how they interact with others. In this section, I discuss the role that identity plays in students' experiences as diversity workshop facilitators. This section is organized into three themes: (1) Sharing

Identities in the Workshops, (2) Understanding Identity through Facilitation, and (3) Effects of Facilitation on Interactions with Others.

**Sharing Identities in the Workshops.** During workshops, facilitators were encouraged to share information about themselves and their identities with the audience. What they chose to share, and when, depended largely on the identities present in the audience of a particular workshop. A theme that emerged when participants talked about why and when they chose to share dimensions of their identities in the workshop was the value of making connections with audience members through acknowledgement of shared identities. Rachael, for example, discussed the importance of facilitators telling workshop attendees about themselves to create a more engaging experience. She explained,

I think when they're more, when you relate to students they open up immediately. So if a student can't relate to you, then they're not gonna talk. And they're uninterested, they sit, they're like, on their phone or just like, fall asleep, so you have to relate to them. You have to open up about your experiences. So if a facilitator doesn't share or is more quiet, more timid, the students won't engage in a conversation.

Rachael also described the importance of relating to audience members through shared identities, saying,

So I always tell a story about myself for the identity, we do like an identity activity in the workshop, I always say like, my race, my ethnicity, my background, what's important to me, what's not as important to me, so the student can feel comfortable in sharing with me what they think. Um, and it's the most important thing. And some facilitators are like city kids, and they can relate to students who come from cities. And I can relate to students who come from an Arab background, a Muslim background. So it's really important that

the facilitator themselves has different backgrounds that the students can relate to and they can open up. It's the most important thing.

Zhang talked about his decision to reach out to individuals in the audience who seemed “vulnerable” or alone in identifying in a particular way. In one activity in the workshop, audience members moved to different areas of the room that represented an aspect of identity that was most salient to them (examples included race, gender, sexuality, and ability status).

Zhang talked about how he chose to speak to certain students during this activity. He said,

We had this activity...standing next to the identity that you were most conscious of, identify people through that activity. And I see who feel very vulnerable, and I kind of put myself along with them to make them feel like they're not the only person. So if, if someone's next to mental disability and saying that, “oh yeah, I struggle with anxiety” or something, I would share one or two of my personal experiences struggling with depression or my best friend have—having panic disorder or a panic attack. Usually that's my tactic.

Another theme that emerged related to what facilitators shared in the workshops is connected to conflicting identities described in the previous section. In the context of sharing in the workshop, however, instead of multiple identities conflicting with one another within the participant, the decision to share an identity was related to the presence of identities in the room that participants felt conflicted with their own. If a participant felt that identifying in a particular way would conflict with identities of students in the workshop, the participant would decide to downplay or hide that aspect of his or her identity. Alex, for example, who identifies as a gay African American man, noted that he is generally open about his sexuality and “over that hump” of coming out. Despite this openness, he talked about a specific instance in the workshops in

which he was reluctant to identify as gay. During the workshop, students were asked to consider a scenario in which a student learned that his roommate was gay and asked to be moved to a different dorm room. Alex described what happened, saying,

We did have a session with...majority um, I think like underrepresented students, so people of color, low-income students. And so that one, I definitely felt comfortable and certain instances, but there was also another part of it, which we talked about the gay scenario, the gay roommate, um, and that was hard for me to facilitate...and I realized I wasn't really comfortable. Like, I felt like, like again, like back in the Black community, back with family, kind of felt more like family so it felt like, more like, I can't, you know?

The workshop director suggested to Alex that he might consider being more open about his sexuality in similar situations because doing so may help students who, like Alex, may struggle with reconciling their racial and sexual identities. Alex stated,

Yeah, 'cause he was like, you know, "it would be great to, for other people of color." Because I'm sure a couple people in those were also in the LGBT community. Um, to see someone doing it up there and still confident, all that stuff. And that like, hit me, and I was like, dang! Maybe I should've said something and stepped more into, for the defense, you know, of the scenario. But yeah, that was hard.

Similarly, Leslie also discussed how she would not necessarily share her bisexual identity with students in the workshop unless another student had also identified as LGBTQ. She said,

Sometimes I wouldn't identify my sexuality just because, again, it's not like a visible thing, but if I notice that someone else in the workshop has, you know, announced their

sexuality...or talked about it, then I would make a point of saying something about my own.

Conversely, Alonzo described how he was more likely to talk about his Dominican heritage if students in the workshop were unfamiliar with Latin America. He said,

I probably share less about what I am, in terms of like, oh like, Dominican history and I'm actually both, um, I probably share that less with like, people who have, are from South American, who are Hispanic, I guess. Um, and when people are from outside of the region I'll just tell them, like, it's kind of assumed if you're from South American or Latin America that like, you know all the other countries. So if I say Dominican, they're like, "oh ok, I know what that is." But like, even like someone from Dubai, they'll be like, "what is that?" So I probably talk more about it in those kind of situations than I would with someone who's from South America.

Participants in the study described various reasons for sharing aspects of their identities in the workshops they facilitated. As evidenced by these descriptions, participants' reasons for deciding whether to share information about themselves and their identities in the workshops largely depended on who was present in the workshop audiences, as well as what audience members shared about themselves. The discussions about identity varied from workshop to workshop depending on the audience, facilitators, and what they chose to disclose about themselves and perceptions of other identities. Participants described how the interactions and discussions during facilitations, driven largely by what facilitators and audience members shared with one another, had an impact on how facilitators learned to think about and understand identity.

**Understanding Identity through Facilitation.** Participants described how facilitating caused them to consider aspects of their own identities or think differently about identity more broadly. Two participants, Sarah and Leslie, talked at length about how their White identity affected their experience as facilitators. Though the two women interpreted their challenges with reconciling their White identities in the workshop setting, the ways in which they discussed their race in the context of the workshops was very different from other participants in the study. Most of the participants of color in the study described being misidentified racially or ethnically in the workshops, but for them, these experiences are common in their everyday lives. For the White women, however, the challenges they experienced because of their White identities were new and somewhat shocking.

As with most participants I interviewed for the study, all three White facilitators expressed a strong desire to be advocates or allies for individuals from historically marginalized identity groups. Sarah and Leslie, however, also reported that they sometimes felt as though students of color who attended the workshops did not believe that they were informed enough to talk about diversity and identity because of their White identities. Sarah, for example, talked about an instance in a workshop in which she received negative feedback from a student after she talked about racism in the U.S. Several of the participants I interviewed described the challenge of answering difficult questions that arose during workshops that were often related to terms or concepts that are often difficult to grasp. During the instance that Sarah recounted, she was asked to clarify the difference between overt and covert biases. Although she was not prepared for the question, she answered based on her understanding of the concepts. She said,

There's this one slide that we have about overt versus covert bias. And so, overt is obviously things you can see whereas covert are more hidden things. And what we have

on there under covert is segregation. And we were in a facilitation and somebody was like, “how is that not noticeable?” And when I first got asked that I was taken off guard because none of us know what to say at this slide *ever*. Like some of us just skip over it because it’s like, I don’t know what to say. And so when I first said it, I said, “you know, like, obviously times have changed, like this isn’t like the civil rights movement, we don’t have Jim Crow laws, things aren’t separated Black and White anymore. However, it still exists that, you know, people in classrooms will segregate to White groups or African American groups and so that segregation still exists, even though it’s not um, physically there.” And I had a girl who was African American sitting in the back and she just like, snickered at me. And she just like, rolled her eyes at me. And I was like, “oh my God! What did I say?” And so that was something that I brought up [with other facilitators]. And I was like, I, “what should I have said?” Because I felt so bad. I was like, should I say something, like, I thought, I thought I did well!

Sarah went on to talk about how this negative experience shaped how she communicated with audience members, particularly students of color, in subsequent workshops. She said,

I would say [there is] pressure to say everything perfectly and to make sure that everybody in the room is ok with what you’re saying. Because even when you do have, like, minority women of color and you say something just a little wrong, not even wrong, just not the way they would’ve phrased it, you can see people get offended. And it’s a lot to have them get offended, and then sometimes you’d have facilitators who are like, “you should’ve said it this way.” And then you have that pressure as well. And so that’s a lot.

Sarah also described feeling that her co-facilitators questioned her ability to facilitate because of her White identity. She said,

I would facilitate with...an international student and with one of my gay African American friends. And so, they would kind of look at me like I didn't know what I was talking about because I'm just this little White girl who's a psych major. And in those situations, it was hard, um, because it felt like they were invalidating me.

Although Sarah described feeling that she was not being taken seriously as a facilitator by students of color in workshops and by her co-facilitators, she also recounted a conversation she had with a workshop program administrator who told her that White facilitators and workshop participants were more likely to listen to Sarah specifically because she is White. Sarah agreed with the administrator and contrasted this with how she felt she was perceived by students of color in the workshops, saying that they "just thought that I had no idea what I was talking about."

Like Sarah, Leslie also reported feeling that her credibility was questioned because of her White identity. The difference, however, was that Leslie talked more about her understanding of why students of different races might be more open to discussing topics with facilitators who look like them. She said,

So sometimes the White students ask me personally, like they would single me out and say like, "what do you think of this?" Or they would make eye contact with me as opposed to the general room. Um, but then also having students of color in the workshop, they would also go to the student of color facilitating. And that's fine, I think that that's great. That's representation. You know, that's saying people like you are also speaking out about this. But also, people unlike you are speaking about issues that you might be feeling. So for me to talk about racism on campus, I would hope, is eye-opening to the

students of color in saying like, there are White students out here who are doing their best to be allies for you and to listen to your experiences and how we can help you.

Where Sarah noted feeling that she was not being taken seriously by her non-White co-facilitators, Leslie reported feeling that her credibility was enhanced, which she felt improved the workshops, if she were paired with a facilitator of color. Leslie said,

If my co-facilitator was Black and I'm White, I feel like my workshop would go about differently than it would if I was White with another White facilitator. Um, so sometimes having a facilitator who was different from me racially gave a greater conversation, or like a more open facilitation, because more people could relate to me as a White person talking about race and saying like, "we need to become more inclusive because of these issues and I'm a White person"...it's not just one group saying that they're being oppressed, it's also a privileged person talking about oppression that other people are feeling. So I feel like, me being there as a White person next to someone who is not White gave a different dynamic. But then if it was just two White people talking about race it kind of fell flat for students of color in the workshop. 'Cause then they're like, "why do I have to listen to these two White girls talk about it?" And that often happened, you know? A lot of people would say, "well, why do you care about this?" And I'm like, I would tell them, but it comes across differently than if I was with someone else.

Although Leslie and Sarah both described how their Whiteness affected their experiences as facilitators, their perceptions of these experiences were somewhat different. Though Leslie talked about the challenges she had encountered as a White facilitator, she also noted the value of having both facilitators of color and White facilitators. She also understood that students were more likely to respond differently to facilitators who look like them and who may have shared

similar experiences. Sarah, however, did not describe these values, but instead focused more on how she felt the students and other facilitators perceived her. For both women, however, talking about diversity and race in the workshops caused them to think about their racial identities in new ways. As I noted in previous sections, facilitators of color reported having their race, nationality, ethnicity, or cultural heritage addressed by others throughout their lives; the White facilitators, however, had never experienced this before facilitating.

Several participants in the study noted that their experiences as facilitators caused them to think more about their own identities. Katie, for example, talked about how working with different groups of students introduced her to new identities, which affected how she thinks about her own identity, saying,

But one of the beautiful things about facilitating and having a new group each week, or even like multiple times a week sometimes, is that they would bring up different points. And so, like the first week I was, you know, positive that I knew about my White privilege and how that meant I was interacting with someone, and someone would bring something up, and it makes you think even farther about what [you're] talking about. And... I definitely don't identify differently at all, not that big of a shift, but just sharing other people's experiences and voices and like, how they react to me and vice versa, just like kind of, expands what I already know about mine.

Alex also described becoming more aware of his own identity through interactions with students in the workshop who also identify as African American but who may not identify strongly with a particular ethnicity or culture. He talked about a question in the workshop script that asked students what aspect of their identity they would like to learn more about and how much he related to students' responses. He said,

We had a lot of Black students go to like ethnicity. And that's something that's so real because at the end of the day, yes you're Black, you're African American, but there's really no other like ethnicity through that. You know? You're really just, your race [in the U.S.], your race or your nationality here... I have a lot of African friends and you know, they are African American, they are Black or whatever, but they have this whole other piece of, like, Nigerian culture or Ugandan culture, you know, like my White friends are like, "oh I'm Irish" or "I'm Scottish" or whatever. To not have any of that, or to not have a lineage or to not have, like an erasure of, like, culture...but then also simultaneously being a part of a culture that you're not really a part of, it's like a very odd space to occupy. So hearing that from other students and other people...that was nice to kind of have that.

Aneesa discussed how facilitating has strengthened her own identity, particularly her religious and cultural identities. She talked about how she had never really considered these identities before facilitating but was able to do so after explaining them to others. She said,

When I'm explaining it to other people I like, realize how important it is to me, because I don't realize how much an effect it has on my life. Because it's just on my mind and I don't think about it consciously. But when I'm talking about it, I think, people see that I'm serious about it and it's not just something I picked up from my parents, it's something that I actually believe in. So I think that's very like, clear, when I talk about it. And also that like, I'm Indian but also American. Explaining that. That I was born in America but Indian culture is still a huge part of my family because my parents was born there...I think explaining that just, taught me more about myself and that I do identify

myself as American but I can also be Indian and also be Muslim and have multiple identities.

Ayesha also described an increased awareness of the various aspects of her identities, saying,

I learned that I'm proud of who I am, I guess you can say. Because...being an American, being Muslim, being a woman, being straight, being all the identities that you can possibly identify yourself, I feel like that made me who I was...I feel like I kind of looked at my identity in a way that I, I feel like other people might see it. Um, but also I feel like I've had a more appreciative perspective on my identity because in, during the workshops, all these people are talking about all these various different identities and each one is unique in their own way and that kind of, like, made me appreciative of my identity as unique and a completely other way. And each one has its own...uniqueness.

Several participants talked about how facilitating workshops for students who identify in different ways has caused them to think differently about identity more broadly, not just with regard to how they themselves identify. Rachael noted that facilitating exposed her to new identities, and people who identify in particular ways, and how valuable this experience was for her. Anne likewise mentioned that she “learn[ed] more every single workshop” about different identities. Miah, too, described how being a facilitator made her consider identities that she had never thought about before and how this made her think more deeply about the various dimensions of her own identity. She said,

I think it just puts into perspective what I think is important versus what other people think is important. 'Cause I never think about, and I say this all the time in [the workshop], I've never thought about like, gender or sexual orientation. Because for me it was very straightforward. Like you know, you're female, you're straight. That's it. There

is nothing else. And then you go to school and you're like, oh, there are other things out there. But even still it was so heavily ingrained in my head and like, around me, that I didn't know anything about it or anything like that. So by learning about other people's experiences, just, religions, sexual orientations, gender, all that stuff, it kind of made me think, ok, what's important to me. Because before, if you asked like, what identity do I even identify as, I was like, I don't know. Human? And so I, I just started kind of prior—not prioritizing, but kind of like, thinking a bit more like, what, understanding that I do kind of have a ranking in my head, and other people don't have the same ranking.

Facilitating workshops and teaching others about identity and diversity affected how participants understood about their own, as well as other, identities. This experience could be challenging, as with Sarah confronting her White identity in a new way, or beneficial, as with Alex connecting with African American students who did not identify with a particular nationality or culture. The experience could also be educational, such as the women who discussed thinking more deeply about their own identities. Regardless of how this experience affected them individually, the process of thinking about identity and teaching their peers influenced how they interacted with others on campus and in their personal lives.

**Effects of Facilitation on Interactions with Others.** Several participants noted that the experience of facilitating impacted their interactions with people outside of the context of the workshop. Two participants, Miah and Alicia, described how the experience of facilitating encouraged them to become more aware of their own assumptions about others. Miah said,

I just learned that words mean a lot more than I ever thought they would...people would say their own experiences [with microaggressions to me] and it's like, well, I've done that to someone before. So it just, it's like a huge thing where you're not perfect and just

because you're [a] facilitator it doesn't mean anything. Like you say things wrong all the time. But now I'm a little bit more conscious. It's like, it's really kind of annoying, but I'll be having a normal conversation with someone and I'll say something, and in my head I'll picture, like, [the workshop program director] or like, [the workshop] or something and I'll be like, "that wasn't, that wasn't a good thing to say."

Alicia also noted that facilitating had taught her to be more aware of her assumptions regarding other people's identities, saying,

Being a facilitator makes you hyperaware of your actions and thoughts on others. I have always been mindful, but when I became a facilitator, this was something I preached over and over again and had to be very aware of my own actions.

In addition to becoming more aware of their own assumptions and behaviors, some participants talked about how they were more willing to challenge the assumptions and behaviors of others because of their facilitation experience. Particularly, participants noted that they were more likely to confront racist, sexist, or homophobic language after having gone through training and facilitating workshops. Sarah, who is from a small, rural town, described how facilitating has made her more vocal about social issues. She said,

I would say definitely going home and seeing people that I went to high school with and having them talk about these issues like they're nothing, I'm definitely more outspoken now that I'm more educated about it... 'cause in high school you would hear all the time about how people weren't ok with gay people being in the hallways and I was always somebody that was like, "why does it, why does it matter to you?" And so I would say something but I'd be more reserved about it, and I would say definitely now, if somebody says something to me... I'll be able to talk with confidence, like, I'm able to recognize

that this is a problem, here is what you need to know about the problem. So definitely this workshop has helped me become more outspoken about it.

Miah likewise described being more likely to speak out, particularly when others use offensive language. She said,

[since facilitating] I started correcting other people, which is kind of obnoxious. Because, like, I never really said ‘retarded’ or anything in my vocabulary. But now if someone else says it, I can’t help but say, “can you please not say that?” Or like, and this is huge with the guys and [some campus] communities, they love saying the n-word. And I don’t understand why. Well, actually, it’s because of rap music, but, you know, they think it’s cool. And before I kind of like, ok whatever, it’s typical, whatever. But now I’m like, “can you not? You’re not a part of that at all.” And so, I’m a lot more vocal now.

Though Katie talked about being more likely to challenge offensive language, she noted that her decision is dependent the people she challenges. She said,

I challenge my dad a lot. He doesn’t like being challenged...he thinks he’s being funny. And...a caveat, my family really is progressive and kind and open-minded but, he’ll say things and I’m just kind of like, well, “it’s still not, you shouldn’t say that.” Um, and so I’ll challenge him. I challenge coworkers. I work at the [a local women’s shelter], which is like a local nonprofit. So we work a lot with women of color and there’ll be a lot of comments [from staff] that like, just shouldn’t happen. Especially since we’re helping them. But I have to work with them for eight hours so I do it differently there that with my dad.

In addition to discussing how they talk about diversity more frequently because of their facilitation experience, several participants described how facilitating has helped them learn *how*

to talk about topics related to diversity and inclusion. Alex, for example, described feeling empowered to talk about these topics because of what he has learned through facilitation in addition to other experiences he has had on campus. He said,

I feel like I finally have a way to talk about it. So like, again in high school...I would have a lot of microaggressions, a lot of things thrown at me, and would literally just take them, you know? Just couldn't say anything just 'cause I was literally the only one. But now I really feel, because of the workshops, empowered, because I have the knowledge. Because of the workshops, because my RA training, because the classes I've taken now, I feel like, I'm a lot more able to actually vocalize, like, "hey...you probably shouldn't say that because of x, y, and z." Actually have conversations, um, and correct people, or just like, I think I'm just more comfortable in talking about it because I talk about it so much in [the workshops]. That if it happens in real life, good or bad or whatever, [it's] way easier to just have those conversations.

Like Alex, Ayesha also noted that she is better able to talk with others about diversity topics. For Ayesha, the value has been in learning how to create meaningful discussions. She stated,

[Facilitating] shaped the way...that I kind of speak with other people, in a way. Because [the workshop] emphasizes the idea of discussion versus debate. And so, kind of, being in that discussion, trying to understand the other person's perspective rather than having to make some sort of commentary, or in a way you don't necessarily have to understand them, but you have to give them the opportunity to speak.

Zhang, too, described putting the discussion skills he had learned as a facilitator to use in interactions with people outside of the workshops, particularly with regard to conversations about politics. He said,

I think now I know how to keep [others with differing opinions] engaged by asking questions. That's always fun because before I thought, you know, it's really awkward, I don't know how, I don't know what to expect from people, but now I've kind of become a facilitator, in front of my friends and family members and ask them, "well, why do you think [that]," you know, "is there any personal experience that you want to share with me?" Just those questions you ask as a facilitator.

Although some facilitators described learning new vocabulary and skills that have helped them interact with others about diversity topics outside of the workshops, Leslie admitted that what she had learned is not always effective. She described how she had attempted to use what she had learned to have conversations with family and friends on Facebook, but she noted that the facilitation techniques do not work on social media. She said,

I was one of those people that would post things [on social media] about it, my political stance and, um, where I think reproductive rights should be, you know, a basic human right, and then I would get hate for it from friends and family on Facebook. And it took a long time for me to just be like, you know what? It's causing me too much pain and I've had to, you know, ruin so many friendships because of it, because I'm going about it in the wrong way. Um, and I was using terminology that I learned through [the workshop] in those conversations. I would say like, "oh, explain your opinion, or explain your experience." But that doesn't happen on Facebook. So I quickly learned that that was a very naive way to go about it. Um, and I think at this point I've kind of just said, if people want to come to me and talk to me about their opinions or if they approach other people in a hateful way about their political opinions, then I need to step in because that's

my job. As just like, I think everyone should. Um, but, it's not my job to, you know, throw words out into the void of Facebook and see what comes back at me.

Zhang also described how the skills he had learned as a facilitator and how he used his own experience as an international student to make these skills more effective. He offered an example related to explaining microaggressions, saying,

So, we had this part, we had this section about asking where you're from. And uh, the, the script was designed in this way: so, I would say, I would ask students, "so now you have learned about [microaggressions]. Can someone tell me why asking people where you're from is offensive?" So...it was a directed question: "why you think it is offensive." And some people would say, you know, they would go along and say yeah, "cause that would make people feel secluded, blah-blah," and it was like, "yes! That's right!" Or you know, someone who might be a minority or ethnic minority growing up in this country, they would feel uncomfortable, and then I realized that that's not my experience. I am a foreigner, I did not grow up in this country as a minority. That wouldn't be my answer. So I, later on, I started to tell them that, you know, it depends on who you ask. If you ask me, I would be happy to tell you where I'm from and I would spend an hour telling you...I grew up in China and was born in Germany, I would take your time. But if you ask my roommate [who] is Hong Kong-ese, who grew up here in the United States. [He] would feel uncomfortable. Actually, we had this experience one time and [he] was like, really shy and he was like, "uhhh, I am American?" And I would tell [students in the workshops] in that way so...they would think, oh yeah. It could be offensive to certain people but it's culturally contingent. You cannot generalize, quote-unquote, offensiveness to the whole crowd.

Participants' facilitation experience influenced their interactions outside of the workshop in two major ways. Some, like Miah and Sarah, were willing to confront offensive language or behaviors that they might not have addressed before working as facilitators. Other participants, such as Ayesha, gained skills that helped them talk about issues presented in the workshops outside of the workshop itself. Although the techniques they learned to facilitate discussions around diversity topics do not always work for them, as with Leslie's example of attempting to engage others in conversations on social media, they nonetheless have found ways of using what they have learned outside of the workshops.

As outlined in this section, Identity and Facilitation, participants' facilitation experience influenced them in several ways. Facilitating challenged them to think more deeply about their own identities and more broadly about identity as a concept. Further, the facilitation experience made them more willing to confront offensive language and behaviors and taught them how to have conversations with others about diversity. The examples participants offered about their experiences facilitating indicate that the dimensions of their identities are conflicting, intersecting, and contextual, and that facilitating influenced how they understand themselves and their identities, how they understand others, and how they interact with people outside of the workshops.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I discussed the findings of this study. The chapter was organized into two major sections. In the first, I provided profiles of each of the study's 13 participants, and in the second, I discussed the findings and themes that emerged through data analysis.

In the first of three sub-sections of the Findings and Themes section of this chapter, How Identities are Shaped, I described findings related to the experiences and relationships that

participants reported has having the most impact on shaping how they understand themselves. Participants reported that family relationships and pre-college experiences influenced how they think about various aspects of their personalities. Several participants talked about being inspired by watching their mothers persevere through hardships, and some described difficult childhood and adolescent experiences that forced them to grow and learn about themselves. Participants also noted that college experiences, particularly coursework and study abroad programs, helped them to learn more about themselves and their identities. They also discussed how social and political events such as the 2016 presidential election, acts of discrimination on campus, and media influences helped to shape how different aspects of their identities.

In the second sub-section, Multiple Dimensions of Identity, I discussed findings related to how the multiple dimensions of participants' identities, particularly their social identities, function in their lives. Specifically, I described how participants reported that the visibility of their identities shapes their interactions with others and how they decide when and under what circumstances to make particular aspects of their identities visible to others. I also discussed how participants reported experiencing conflict related to their identities, whether this conflict results from the existence of two simultaneously held identities, or because one or more aspects of their identities conflict with others' identities, and I outlined the effects that this conflict has on participants' lives. In this sub-section, I also described the various ways that multiple dimensions of participants' identities can be linked to one another.

In the final sub-section, Identity and Facilitation, I discussed findings related to the role that identity has played in participants' experiences as workshop facilitators. Participants reported that the identities of the students who attended the workshops, and what the students chose to share about themselves, affected what facilitators shared with students, which then

affected the discussions that occurred in the workshops. These discussions, in turn, affected what facilitators learned about identity and how they thought about their own identities. Participants reported then incorporating this learning and understanding into other aspects of their lives.

The findings outlined in this chapter reveal that the ways in which participants think about themselves and their identities are complex, contextual, and dynamic. They further reveal that identity, and specifically, identities that are present and made visible in workshops, have a direct effect on facilitators' experiences and on the content of the workshops themselves. In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of these findings, consider the study's limitations, offer suggestions for future research, and reflect on my experiences collecting and analyzing data for the study.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative study sought to explore the experiences of undergraduate students who facilitated identity-based diversity workshops for their peers and how this experience affected how they understand their own social identities. In this chapter, I discuss the study's findings, examine its limitations, provide implications for theory, practice, and policy, and offer suggestions for future research. I also share a reflection on my experience completing this work.

### Discussion

One of the study's primary goals was to understand how facilitating diversity workshops allowed students to reflect on and understand their own social identities. Perhaps the most influential aspect of facilitating on participants' understanding of their identities was the introduction of language and concepts that allowed them to process their identities in new ways. Participants also reported becoming more aware of their own biases and assumptions as a result of facilitating and more likely to confront racist, sexist, or homophobic language as a result of their facilitation experience. While these effects were generally positive, participants also noted some difficulties associated with becoming more aware of themselves and their identities. Facilitating caused some participants to confront dimensions of their own identities that they had not previously considered, which could be a source of anxiety for them. As I discussed in Chapter 4, this was particularly true for White facilitators. Facilitators of color described having considered their race or nationality, often as a result of having experienced discrimination or microaggressions, before they began working as facilitators; for White facilitators, however, considering their race was a new, sometimes unsettling, experience.

The resistance that White facilitators reported experiencing in the workshops, particularly Sarah, may very well have been reality. However, it is also possible that the resistance the White facilitators felt may have been of their own making. As Jones (1995) pointed out, a sense of difference in the context of others can increase salience of a particular identity dimension. If White facilitators felt a sharp sense of “difference” while among students and facilitators of color, their sense of Whiteness may have been increased. It could be that White facilitators, now having a heightened awareness of their Whiteness, interpreted body language or changes in tone from students of color as incredulity or judgment. Regardless of the source of this tension, its effects were very real for White facilitators and impacted how they thought about their White identities.

Participants across all identity groups described how the salience of various dimensions of their identities shifted depending on the audience members present in a given workshop. As noted in Chapter 4, what participants chose to share with audience members often depended on what identities they perceived as being present in the room, and what they shared affected the depth and tone of the workshop conversations. The fact that participants reported becoming more aware of particular dimensions of their identities and changing what they shared about themselves underscores a foundational aspect of multiple dimensions of identity theory that the salience of identities can shift depending on context. Although all dimensions of a facilitator’s identity were present at a given time, participants reported being more aware of an identity dimension, thus more willing to reveal or discuss that aspect of themselves, within a workshop. This finding is significant because it underscores the role that facilitators have in shaping dialogue and discussion (Maxwell, Nagda, & Thompson, 2011; Quaye & Johnson, 2016).

The findings of this study affirm the literature on identity development of college students, particularly that students' experiences on campus can be hugely influential on shaping how students understand themselves. As noted in Chapter 4, participants reported that pre-college experiences were more influential in shaping their "core" identities, or the aspects of themselves that remained mostly constant regardless of context (Jones & McEwen, 2000). As they moved to the college environment, however, they reported becoming more aware of various dimensions of their social identities due to relationships on campus, educational experiences, and social influences. Perhaps the most influential of these aspects of college were their social relationships. A number of participants reported that dimensions of their identities were strengthened or validated by joining friend groups and organizations with other students with whom they share identities. Participants in this study reported that friend groups and organizations that work to support students who identify similarly as themselves offered a sense of security and a relaxed environment that may not exist in other spaces on campus in which they are minoritized, such as classroom settings or academic departments. Perhaps not surprisingly, these spaces were particularly beneficial for participants from historically marginalized groups, as highlighted in this study, Muslim, African American, LGBTQ, Asian, and Latinx students. Two participants in the study had even started their own identity-related student organization as a means of creating a common space for students with shared identities and experiences. These findings support literature on the experiences of students of color at predominately White institutions that suggest that racial or ethnic grouping offers students a supportive environment separate from the spaces in which they are more likely to be subject to discrimination (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Villalpando, 2003; Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

The self-selected groups participants reported finding or forming were only one space they occupied on campus. As they moved through different campus contexts such as classes, co-curricular activities, and other spaces, the salience of an identity dimension could shift if they felt a sense of difference among their peers. As Jones (1995, 1997) noted, not “looking like” a member of a race or ethnic group can influence how salient that identity is in a particular context. This was especially true for the Muslim women in the study who reported often being the only Muslim woman, either with or without hijab, in their classes. These women, along with several other participants in the study, noted that the visibility of an identity affected how salient that identity was at any given time. Interestingly, participants in this study also discussed purposefully manipulating aspects of their appearance to emphasize an identity dimension, as was the case with Alonzo growing out his hair to highlight his Black identity. This finding suggests that, depending on the student and the context, “looking different” can be a positive experience. Some of the Muslim women in the study, despite noting a sense of security around other Muslim students, described feeling pride associated with standing out among their peers. Thus, although some participants reported choosing to blend in, others described actively seeking out a sense of difference as a way of appreciating or highlighting their identities.

The findings of this study provide insight into the multiple dimensions of identity of the participants, how these identities are understood, and how they shape participants’ lives. Further, the study’s findings also indicate the importance of identity across the student population. Several participants noted instances in which other students made assumptions or asked questions about their social identities. They also noted understanding, however, that despite the exhaustion and frustration often associated with addressing these questions, their peers seemed to be genuinely curious about their backgrounds rather than seeking a category in which to place

the individual for the purpose of discrimination. Despite this understanding, however, constantly fielding these types of questions (i.e., Where are you *really* from? What ethnicity are you?, etc.) can be tiring for students, and the questions and assumptions may be read, sometimes rightly so, as microaggressions. Minoritized students often feel that the onus for furthering understanding and bridging divides among social groups often falls upon them rather than on individuals from dominant groups (Ochoa & Pineda, 2008). Indeed, some participants in this study noted feeling a sense of responsibility to teach others. Aneesa, for example, noted that it was her “job” to “have an experience with [others] that might change their mind in the future.” Although assumptions and questions about ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds can be challenging for students to address, particularly when they must do so repeatedly and in a number of spaces on campus, it is somewhat understandable that students from dominant identity groups would want to ask questions about others’ identities given that social identity groups are emphasized in diversity coursework and in the workshop at the center of this study. Further, this focus on identity, as well as students’ curiosity about peers who look different and come from different backgrounds, highlights the falsehood of a “post-racial” society. Instead, identity, particularly visible identities and those related to race and ethnicity, are paramount in students’ collective consciousness.

Although some majority students may indeed need to approach their peers with questions and assumptions in a more tactful manner, opening conversations about race and ethnicity is a step forward in helping students understand each other. Indeed, it is not (and should not be) the responsibility of students of color and other students from minoritized social groups to teach their non-minority peers about their experiences, but the findings of this study suggest that all students might benefit from a space that allows majority students to ask honest questions. Teaching students to ask better, more appropriate questions, and in an acceptable format, might

promote greater understanding and lessen tensions between groups on campus. Thus, a balance must be found between burdening minoritized students with the responsibility of educating their majority peers, while also allowing majority students to ask questions about races, ethnicities, cultures, and other aspects of identity that they do not understand. Because meaningful interaction with others is vital for producing the potential benefits of structural diversity on campus, these conversations, though sometimes difficult and uncomfortable, are necessary for fostering more positive campus environments and experiences for all students.

### **Limitations**

Although I took measures to ensure trustworthiness of findings, the study is limited in several ways. One limitation of this study is its relatively small number of participants. Out of 53 students who facilitated workshops during the spring 2017 semester, I interviewed 13 for this study. Nonetheless, each participant in the study brought with him or her a unique combination of race, nationality, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, gender identity, and religion, providing rich insight into the experiences of facilitators who identify across a number of social groups.

Another possible limitation is that the study's findings only reflect the experiences of a handful of students who facilitated diversity workshops at one university in the Midwest. A similar study consisting of interviews with participants from colleges and universities across the U.S. may have yielded different results due to different institutional, regional, or cultural contexts. Though limited in this way, this study was not intended to provide a generalizable analysis of the experiences of all undergraduate students who lead diversity workshops across all colleges and universities. The context of the diversity workshops in this particular study had a direct influence on what content was included in the workshops, the format in which the content

was delivered, and who delivered the content to students. At the macro level, diversity content taught at a predominately White, yet structurally diverse, Midwestern research university is unlikely to resemble the content at, for example, a small, predominately White, private, religious college in the Deep South. Further, the content of workshops facilitated in 2017 is unlikely to resemble the content delivered in colleges 20 years ago because conversations regarding diversity, identity, and inclusion depend greatly on current political and social climates. At the micro level, each diversity workshop offered in 2017, although scripted to cover the same material, was delivered differently depending on the instructor, the demographics of the students in attendance, or local or national events in the news that brought more salience to one particular topic or another. Because of the many variables at play within the context of the diversity workshops, this study only intended to examine the experiences of this particular group of student facilitators, at this particular university, and at this particular time.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a starting point from which to explore the experiences of undergraduate diversity instructors and the implications of charging undergraduate students with this important work.

### **Implications**

This study's findings present several implications for theory, practice, and policy. The framework used to understand identity in this study, multiple dimensions of identity theory (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Jones, 1995; Jones & Abes, 2013; Jones & McEwen, 2000), proved to be a valuable tool for gaining insight into how students understand themselves and their identities in various contexts. The findings of this study highlight the interconnected, dynamic, and contextual nature of social identities and support existing literature on college student identity development. The theoretical implications of this study include contributions to

study of college student identity development, particularly multiple dimensions of identity theory. All the participants in this study revealed an awareness of the multiple aspects of their identities and could articulate how the salience of these identities shifted depending on context, underscoring the primary components of the original Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Multiple dimensions of identity theory thus helped to understand how participants in this study process their own identities and the ways in which those identities are either oppressed and privileged, as they simultaneously teach their peers to think about their identities. As noted in Chapter 2, Jones and Abes (2013) suggested that the MMDI can be combined with other theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality or critical race theory to reveal a more nuanced understanding identity and identity formation. Future research may offer deeper insight into the experiences of undergraduates who teach diversity if examined through a framework consisting of both multiple dimensions of identity theory and other social identity theories.

The findings of this study also present a number of practical implications. Part of the interview protocol used for this study involved questions regarding participants' experiences with training for workshops, working with co-facilitators, and participants' thoughts on the support and resources available to them. The responses participants provided regarding these questions, as well as the unsolicited opinions they offered on the overall structure and content of the workshops, would be beneficial for administrators of this and similar programs.

Most participants in this study discussed wanting more substantive training to better prepare them for difficult questions and situations in the workshops and more hands-on exercises to prepare them to be better facilitators. Participants also expressed wanting to work only one or two co-facilitators throughout the semester, rather than the current system, which involves being

randomly paired with a new co-facilitator at each workshop. Other notable feedback from participants included more time for discussion and reflection with program staff and with co-facilitators, more consistent management styles among program staff, and more opportunities to practice facilitation skills before workshops begin.

If undergraduates continue to be expected to facilitate diversity workshops, thus being trusted to deliver timely and important information to their peers, program staff need to be aware that the experience of facilitating varies greatly among facilitators, and that the support systems in place should be equipped to address facilitators' individual needs. Just as participants in this study reported finding safe environments among other students who identify in similar ways as themselves, facilitators may also benefit from advising or counseling from staff members with shared identities and experiences. Program administrators might consider expanding the program's staff to include a diverse team of advisors, faculty, or staff members who can offer additional training, education, resources, and support for facilitators. These advisors may be able to close some of the knowledge gaps that exist among facilitators, therefore creating a more meaningful, useful workshop experiences for all students.

Although this study was not designed to examine the outcomes of the diversity workshops, it should be noted that having undergraduate workshop facilitators take on this work has the potential to inhibit learning among workshop attendees. This is particularly true if facilitators do not have the content knowledge needed to adequately explain key concepts and provide examples. Several participants described having an unclear understanding of some topics, particularly covert racism and implicit biases. Although most participants reported relying on their co-facilitators to fill in the gaps in their knowledge or knowing whom to ask for help, several participants recalled skipping over difficult sections of the workshops entirely because

they could not properly explain the concepts. This underscores the fact that facilitators need more training that is adequate in order to do this work.

The results of this study also reveal implications for institutional policy related to delivering diversity education to students. Participants' reports of students resisting or challenging workshop material is consistent with literature on teaching diversity (Ahlquist, 1991; Berlak, 1999; Brown, 2004; Bowman, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2002). As Gurin and colleagues (2002) suggest, part of this resistance may stem from a cognitive disequilibrium experienced when students receive new information that does not match their existing worldviews. When students are introduced to perspectives that do not match their own, they struggle to reconcile new ideas with how they experience the world, which can manifest in the form of disagreement, defensiveness, and sometimes outright hostility. As Bowman (2010) noted, literature on diversity courses indicates that students may be able to adjust their worldviews through diversity courses, but "this adjustment process is difficult and unlikely to be fully resolved at the end of one course" (p. 546). Thus, coursework on diversity that is embedded across the curriculum, with time allotted for personal reflection and opportunities to practice new communication and intercultural skills, may be more beneficial for students than a two-hour-long workshop.

The implications for changes in institutional diversity education policy are further suggested by the fact that some participants in this study reported not fully understanding the topics they discussed in the workshops. This lack of knowledge among students in their second, third, and fourth years on campus suggest that the workshops they themselves attended as first-year students were ineffective and that their other coursework did not adequately cover these topics, if they covered them at all. This is particularly concerning because the majority of students who facilitate workshops are pursuing degrees in humanities or social sciences, areas

where coursework is more likely to include diversity topics (Nelson Laird, 2011). If students in these fields are not receiving effective diversity education, exposure of diversity topics to students in majors outside of the liberal arts, such as business or engineering, could be even less. In order for higher education to foster democratic ideals and prepare students to navigate and participate in a multicultural world, institutional policies should promote sustained, consistent, and effective diversity education in all disciplines across the curriculum. Moreover, the responsibility of providing diversity education should not be left to student affairs offices, which may not have (or may not be given) the resources necessary for taking on this work. Instead, academic and student affairs offices must work together to create a co-curricular experience that is intentional in its efforts to foster regular, meaningful interactions among students, both in and out of the classroom. Fostering informal interactions between students in a variety of settings across campus is necessary for achieving benefits that mere numerical diversity cannot.

In addition to expanding diversity education on campus, diversity programs must move beyond simply providing concepts to students. While teaching students concepts such as implicit bias, microaggressions, and privilege is important, program administrators must work intentionally to improve campus conditions. The urgency of addressing the lived experiences of college students, particularly those from historically marginalized social groups, is illustrated in the increase of reported incidents of intolerance in recent years. At the University of Illinois, for example, the number of reported “bias-motivated incidents” rose from 61 during the 2015-2016 academic year to 116 in 2016-2017.<sup>9</sup> Such acts of intolerance can negatively impact students, as indicated throughout literature on campus climate and, as outlined in Chapter 4, the stories of participants in this study.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://bart.illinois.edu/reports/docs/bart-report-2016-17.pdf>

Although well-intentioned, the diversity program at the center of this study exhibits many of the problems and inadequacies often associated with college diversity programs, and thus offers insights into how to improve such programs. Particularly, despite the rhetoric of mission statements and strategic initiatives that espouse a commitment to diversity on campus, the reality of a university's actions regarding promotion of diversity and support for students from all backgrounds is often quite different. Offices that oversee diversity efforts are not necessarily given the resources required to create effective, sustainable programs for students. Specific to the program at the center of this study, using undergraduate students who may or may not be prepared, either developmentally or practically, to deliver such challenging yet important material to their peers indicates where the university's priorities lie regarding diversity education. A perceived lack of value on diversity education for students is also underscored by the strikingly small number of staff members assigned to supervise and support facilitators. Further, the program also lacks a theoretical framework for fostering change in students' attitudes and behaviors, and there are no substantive methods in place for measuring what students learn as a result of the workshops, nor are there stated expectations of outcomes for workshop facilitators. Programs created and implemented without explicitly stated outcomes that students are expected to achieve, as well as meaningful, useful measures in place to assess those outcomes, are unlikely to help ease tensions on campus. They are also unlikely to foster the cultural competence necessary for effectively participating in our increasingly multicultural society. Simply offering a diversity program or workshop is not enough. Diversity programs for college students must be intentionally delivered, appropriately funded, and regularly evaluated. If such measures are not taken, diversity programs only serve contribute to a false reality of institutional commitment to diversity.

## **Directions for Future Research**

The findings in this study present opportunities to explore aspects of undergraduate diversity workshop facilitators' experiences in more depth. One area that might be examined in future research is related to the demographic makeup of workshop facilitators. The demographic makeup of facilitators in this study mirrors national data on who teaches diversity material. As noted in Chapter 3, diversity instructors across the U.S. are disproportionately men and women of color (McKay, 1997; Nelson Laird, 2011; Perry, Moore, Acosta, Edwards, & Frey, 2006; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). Similarly, most facilitators are students of color; in fact, during the spring 2017 semester, only six out of the 53 facilitators identify as White. Further, national data indicates that more women than men teach diversity courses or include diversity material in their own courses (Nelson Laird, 2011). Only five of the 53 facilitators during the spring of 2017 identify as men. Of the four male participants I interviewed for this study, not one of them identifies as straight – two identify as gay, one as pansexual, and one as queer. Future research on undergraduate diversity instructors and workshop facilitators could explore why straight, White men are so much less likely to take on this work than men and women of color, men who do not identify as heterosexual, and White women. Future research might also explore why White women are more inclined to do this work than White men, or what factors might be discouraging White men from being advocates for marginalized individuals.

Future research might also examine more closely the long-term effects of facilitating on students of color. In this study, White participants described the emotional weight of facilitating more than participants of color; existing studies on diversity instructors, however, suggests that diversity instructors of color face a particular set of challenges, one of which is dealing with resistance from students. Though most participants in this study described having overall

positive experiences as facilitators, each one described an incident in which a workshop audience member became disruptive or hostile, which negatively affected the workshop and caused a sense of anxiety among facilitators and audience members. Literature on diversity courses notes that such resistance in diversity courses is common and has the potential to hinder learning (Ahlquist, 1994; Berlak, 1999; Perry, Moore, Edwards, Acosta, & Frey, 2009). The literature also indicates that diversity instructors of color, as are most of the workshop facilitators, are more likely to experience resistance (Ahlquist, 1994; Berlak, 1999; Brown, 2004; Bowman, 2009; Ukpokodu, 2002). Research indicates that students of color on college campuses continue to experience regular instances of racism (Linley, 2018), and attention should be paid to how managing these negative experiences while navigating the challenges associated with facilitating workshops affects students of color. Research in this area might provide particular insight into how students of color manage and are affected by racial battle fatigue, which may be exacerbated by discussing difficult topics with other students.

Another area that might be explored is the experiences of undergraduate peer leaders who are assigned to teach others about diversity, rather than students who volunteer or apply to do this work. This study focused solely on the experiences of students who chose to facilitate diversity workshops, and as noted in the participant profiles section of Chapter 4, most participants sought out this work due to their own experiences with diversity either before or after beginning their undergraduate careers. This study was built around the assumption that these experiences, as well as students' interaction with and exposure to diversity on campus, gave them an awareness of many different identities, experiences, and perspectives which prompted them to reflect on their own identities, experiences, and perspectives. A study examining the experiences of students who were assigned to teach diversity material may reveal

that those students reflect upon and understand their identities differently than the participants in this study.

Future study of the experiences of facilitators may benefit from following a case study design, perhaps involving workshop observation and multiple interviews with participants throughout their facilitation experience. A study designed in this way might provide a more complete analysis of how facilitators process their identities, and how their understanding of identity either shifts or remains the same over the course of a semester. Further, because this study only presents a snapshot of the experiences of workshop facilitators, a longitudinal study may provide more insight into the identity development of facilitators over time.

### **Reflection**

As I moved through the process of talking to students about how their lives are affected by the various dimensions of their identities, I could not help but think about my own identities and their influence on me. Going into this study, I was aware of my position of privilege as a straight, White, female who was born in the United States. I was also aware of the ways in which my upbringing in a working-class family and my experiences as a first-generation college student exposed me to disadvantages that some of my peers and colleagues have never experienced. Like the participants in my study, I had (and have) a keen awareness that no one aspect of my identity defines me, and through my graduate education and subsequent reflection of my own experiences, I was (and am) aware that the identities that are most salient to me shift and move depending on context. These shifts were palpable as I interviewed students whose identities are different from my own. For example, I found myself being more comfortable in my interviews with White female participants. My comfort level in these interviews was due in part to feeling as though I could connect to these women because they and I had many shared

experiences and perspectives. However, and perhaps due to this very fact, I found these interviews to be the least interesting. I found that during interviews with participants who identified differently than I do in terms of race, sexual orientation, or nationality, I was much more interested in hearing their stories simply because they were new to me. These differences, though, created in me a level of anxiety that I had to work to overcome. I found myself questioning the questions I asked these participants, second-guessing my interpretation of their responses, and worrying that my follow-up questions, comments, or clarifying remarks to them may be misread, or worse, that I may commit the very microaggressions the participants described as having had a negative impact on their college and life experiences. Further, although I approached my interviews with openness and genuine curiosity, I wondered whether participants would have been willing to talk about particular events, relationships, or feelings with an interviewer who shared their identities.

The fact that I, now a thirty-something-year-old woman nearing the end of her graduate studies, felt challenges associated with aspects of my social identities as I interviewed participants for my doctoral dissertation is evidence that social identity development is a lifelong process. Similar to the participants in this study, who are much younger than I and who are at different stages in their lives, interacting with individuals from different backgrounds who identify in different ways made me more understanding of others' experiences and encouraged me to think more critically about my privilege and positionality. In this way, I feel that my own identity development has been greatly enriched by my experiences conducting this research.

### **Conclusion**

The facilitators who participated in this study are, for the most part, highly informed and aware of current political and social events. As I noted in Chapter 4, nearly each one described

being affected by some social or political influence, such as the 2016 presidential election, acts of discrimination on campus, or images in the media, indicating that they are aware of the world around them. Although the students who work as facilitators are mature, thoughtful, and engaged with current events, it is important to note that they are still young adults in a critical period of development. This study's findings reinforce that undergraduate students who facilitate diversity workshops are still learning how to think about and process identity, both their own identities and "identity" as an amorphous concept, as they teach others.

Further, because high schools are often segregated or separated along race and socioeconomic lines, diversity on college campuses may be students' first exposure to individuals from different backgrounds. Several participants in this study noted that this was indeed the case for them. This is particularly important to note because facilitators, while processing new experiences with others and understanding new identities, arguably a challenging task for any person, are simultaneously teaching their peers how to communicate with different peers. Facilitators are expected to teach other students how to, for example, avoid microaggressions, while at the same time learning how to avoid microaggressions themselves. They are, then, learning a skill while simultaneously teaching the skill to others. If undergraduate students are to take on the important but challenging task of teaching their peers about diversity, it is imperative that program administrators understand where these students are developmentally before, during, and after the facilitation experience, and that they understand the challenges facilitating may present for individual students. Only with this understanding will facilitators continue their own development in a positive and meaningful way, but they will also be better prepared to teach others who are undergoing the same critical stage of development.

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## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS' QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

	Major(s)	Mother's Educational Background	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Religion	Race	First Language
<b>Alex</b>	Molecular and Cellular Biology, Psychology	College degree	Male	Gay	Christian	African American or Black	English
<b>Alicia</b>	Health Administration	College degree	Female	Straight	Christian	African American or Black	English
<b>Alonzo</b>	Neuroscience	H.S. diploma/GED	Male	Gay	Atheist	African American or Black, Hispanic or Latino/a	Spanish
<b>Aneesa</b>	Economics	Graduate/prof. degree	Female	Straight	Muslim	Asian or Pacific Islander	English
<b>Anne</b>	Molecular and Cellular Biology, Psychology	Some college	Female	Straight	Muslim	White/Middle Eastern	English and Arabic
<b>Ayesha</b>	Global studies, History, Spanish	H.S. diploma/GED	Female	Straight	Muslim	Middle Eastern/Arab	English
<b>Benjamin</b>	Latino Studies, English	Graduate/prof. degree	Trans, Male	Pansexual	Catholic	Hispanic or Latino/a	English
<b>Katie</b>	Psychology	Graduate/professional degree	Female	Straight	Atheist	White	English
<b>Leslie</b>	Learning and Education Studies	College degree	Female	Bisexual	Atheist	White	English
<b>Miah</b>	Integrative Biology	Some college	Female	Straight	Muslim – Sunni	Asian or Pacific Islander	English
<b>Rachael</b>	Political Science	Graduate/prof. degree	Female	Straight	Muslim	White, Middle Eastern	English
<b>Sarah</b>	Psychology	Graduate/prof. degree	Female	Straight	Agnostic	White	English
<b>Zhang<sup>10</sup></b>	Psychology, Communication	Graduate/prof. degree	Male	Queer	Non-religious	Asian or Pacific Islander	Mandarin

<sup>10</sup> Zhang is the only participant who was an international student. International/domestic student status was included on the pre-interview questionnaire but is not included in Figure 5 due to space constraints.