EXPLORING THE STRENGTHS, RESILIENCIES, AND CHALLENGES OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL FEMALES WHO EXPERIENCED DATING VIOLENCE IN A SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIP DURING ADOLESCENCE

By

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This thesis is dedicated to those who have shared and will share their stories to make projects like this possible, and to everyone working for equality, social justice, and human rights.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Development</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Influences</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Influences</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Influence</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Aspects</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 METHODS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verification Procedure</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 RESULTS</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support/Trust</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation/Relating to Others</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self as a Priority/Boundaries</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Cultural Competence/Marginalization</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 DISCUSSION</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Future Research</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX

A  INFORMED CONSENT ................................................................. 51

B  SCREENING QUESTIONS .............................................................. 55

C  INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ............................................................... 57

D  DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE .................................................. 60

E  IRB 02 APPROVAL LETTERS .......................................................... 62

F  RECRUITMENT FLIER ................................................................. 66

G  RECRUITMENT EMAIL ................................................................. 68

LIST OF REFERENCES ....................................................................... 70

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ................................................................ 74
EXPLORING THE STRENGTHS, RESILIENCIES, AND CHALLENGES OF LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL FEMALES WHO EXPERIENCED DATING VIOLENCE IN A SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIP DURING ADOLESCENCE

By

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OBJECTIVE: The objective of this research study was to explore the strengths and resiliencies that helped lesbian and bisexual females overcome the negative experience of adolescent dating violence, and to inform further studies on LGB affirmative counseling and counseling survivors of dating violence. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS: The study was designed using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Individual interviews were held in which participants were asked open-ended questions related to their past experiences. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed and the data was analyzed for significant statements and themes. RESULTS: Six themes emerged from the data; five were related to strengths and resiliency factors and the sixth theme was related to challenges to accessing resources. The themes found were a) goals, b) support/trust, c) validation/relating to others, d) self as priority/boundaries, e) values, and f) lack of cultural competence/marginalization.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Overview

The Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling endorsed competencies for counselors to provide counseling that is not simply tolerant of differences, but accepting and affirmative of lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, intersex, and questioning (LGBQIQ) people and their relationships (Harper et al., 2012). Within these competencies are comprehensive guidelines for training, practice, advocacy, and research that is LGBQIQ affirmative. Following these guidelines, the researcher sought to explore lesbian and bisexual females’ experiences of adolescent dating violence through an affirmative and strengths-based lens, focusing on the strengths and resiliencies that helped these females to overcome their experiences of dating violence. Additionally, this researcher explored the challenges experienced by the participants while they attempted to access resources, particularly in regard to systemic racial and heterosexual privilege.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) seems to occur in same-sex/same-gender relationships at rates similar to those found in opposite-sex relationships (Stevens, Korchmaros, & Miller, 2010). Additionally, research suggests that LGBT people utilize counseling at twice the rate of heterosexual people (Singh & Shelton, 2011). However, limited research exists on the strengths and resiliencies of this population when coping with IPV or dating violence (DV). It is for this reason that the researcher chose to explore the phenomenon of resiliencies and support-seeking through a qualitative, phenomenological study. A qualitative phenomenological approach provides an opportunity for the research to gather information about the individuals’ personal
experiences, which is then analyzed to extract the common themes, or essence. The researcher believes that this approach is in line with an affirmative, strengths-based approach because it allows the participants the opportunity to reflect on their strengths and resiliencies in regards to themselves and their families, peers, culture, and community. Exploring the essence of what was helpful (or not helpful) for adolescent females overcoming the negative impact of dating violence may influence future counseling practice in working with this population, while also identifying areas for future research.

**Literature Review**

Dating violence (DV) is encompassed within the category of intimate partner violence (IPV), which is a public health concern that may affect as many as 4.8 million women in the United States each year (Stevens et al., 2010). IPV is defined as violence within a romantic relationship, which may include physical, sexual, or emotional/psychological violence (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010; Raiford, Wingood, & DiClemente, 2007; Stephenson, Martosof, Draucker, 2011). This issue is crucial to professional counselors because of the wide range of negative outcomes associated with DV, including depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation (Stephenson et al., 2011). Researchers have identified several risk factors associated with dating violence, including past experiences of DV or IPV, exposure to interparental violence during childhood, depression, delinquency, and substance abuse (Akers, Yonas, Burke, & Chang, 2011; Draucker & Martsolf, 2010; Stephenson, et al., 2011; Stevens et al., 2010). When DV occurs in adolescence, the effects may be more significant because of the enhanced vulnerability associated with that developmental stage. Adolescent dating violence (ADV) is important in terms of both its present and future effects. The focus of
this literature review is female adolescents and DV, with an emphasis on its relationship to adolescent development, family dynamics, and multicultural issues. This includes an exploration of theories regarding both victimization and perpetration.

**Adolescent Development**

Adolescence is a unique stage of development estimated to range from as early as age 11 to as late as age 24. It is divided into three categories: (a) early adolescence (11-13), (b) middle adolescence (14-18), and (c) late adolescence (19-24) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.). During this developmental period, adolescents cope with the physical challenges of puberty, cognitive and emotional changes, and changing social roles and expectations. Therefore, adolescents are at an increased risk for psychological distress (Dixon, Scheidegger, & McWhirter, 2009). Additionally, psychological, emotional, and behavioral problems might be especially detrimental during this stage of life because of changes in societal expectations, the increase of intimacy in peer relationships, and the process of identity formation (Akos & Ellis, 2008). Dixon et al. (2009) stated that as many as one out of five adolescents between the ages of 11 and 14 may have "a mental, behavioral, or emotional problem", and as many as 1 in 10 have a "serious emotional problem" (p. 302), yet intervention only takes place in approximately 30% of these cases.

Identity development is the "foremost task" of adolescence (Dixon, Scheidegger, and McWhirter, 2009, p. 303). Parents, peers, non-parental adults (i.e., mentors and teachers), and the community interact to influence the different elements of identity development, including emotional regulation, conflict resolution, self-concept, self-representation, vocational exploration, explorations in commitment making, and a sense of belonging or mattering (Akos & Ellis, 2008; Beyers & Goosens, 2008; Dixon et al.,
On a cognitive level, adolescents are also developing advanced decision making skills, moral reasoning, critical thinking skills, and an awareness of racism, discrimination, and inequality (Akos & Ellis, 2008). All of these changes can make adolescence a chaotic and confusing time, and events that occur during adolescence can have a lifelong effect because of the impact on identity development.

Romantic relationships in adolescence might be especially important to adolescent development because they serve as "training" relationships in which adolescents explore their roles and identities in intimate relationships (Lichter & McCloskey, 2004). Lichter and McCloskey (2004) posited that female adolescents may be prone to forgiving bad behavior from a partner because of the idealized romanticism present in this stage of life. The researchers also stated that teen dating relationships could contribute to the development of gender-role identity, self-esteem, social competence, and interpersonal skills, such as empathy and intimacy. Draucker and Martsolf (2010) listed development of intimacy and sexuality as one of the key tasks of adolescence. It may be because of the crystallization of identity during this period that dating violence victimization during adolescence is one of the main predictive factors for dating violence in adulthood.

Dating violence victimization of female adolescents has been associated with depression, substance use, antisocial behaviors, delinquent behaviors, academic struggles, a higher than average number of sexual partners, exposure to violence or neglect at home or in the community, past victimizations, suicidal ideation, and suicidal behaviors, though the direction of these relationships still remains unclear (Raiford et al., 2007; Spriggs, Halpern, Herring & Schoenbach, 2009; Tyler, Brownridge &
Melander, 2011). For counselors to develop appropriate prevention and intervention strategies targeting negative mental health outcomes, it is important to understand the interactive nature of these elements, as well as the direct and indirect relationships. Since there is no one-size-fits-all explanation for why adolescent dating violence occurs, it is also important to examine the positive influences that may act as resiliency or protective factors.

**Parental Influences**

There are many theories that have been used as a framework for understanding and researching adolescent dating violence, including theories of intergenerational transmission of risk (cycle of violence), social cognitive/learning theory, antisocial orientation, a developmental-ecological model of risk and development, and the theory of gender and power (Boivin, Lavoie, Hebert, & Gagne, 2011; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004; Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, & Simon, 2009; Raiford et al., 2007; Tyler, et al., 2011). Tyler et al. (2011), used a combination of social learning theory and antisocial orientation theory to examine how the effects of poor parenting are related to both perpetration and victimization of dating violence in adolescence. Both of these theories fall under the umbrella of intergenerational transmission, but the former suggests a direct relationship and the latter suggests an indirect relationship. Based on social learning theory, the researchers posited that victims of childhood violence may internalize a rationalization for violence that puts them at risk for becoming victims of violence again. They also suggested that, based on antisocial orientation theory, youth who are exposed to poor parenting, such as abuse and low levels of support, are at a higher risk for dating violence through engaging in antisocial behaviors such as delinquency and substance abuse (Tyler et al., 2011).
A social cognitive framework was utilized by Lichter and McCloskey (2004) to study the effects of childhood exposure to marital violence and dating violence in adolescence. They reported that exposure to marital violence as a child would result in gender-based beliefs about roles in families, work, and dating relationships. These roles place women in a subordinate role and may put them at risk for violence from their male partners. They posited that these gender-based beliefs may be at their strongest during adolescence because of increased attention paid to gender-related expectations. In accordance with the social cognitive framework, it would be expected that female adolescents exposed to interparental violence would be at a much higher risk for dating violence victimization. Lichter and McCloskey's research demonstrated that exposure to marital violence was associated with attitudes that condoned or justified violence against women as an acceptable form of conflict resolution in both male and female adolescents. This research might suggest an indirect link exists between exposure to marital violence and adolescent dating violence, rather than a direct link such as modeling witnessed behavior.

The indirect link, a tenet of the antisocial framework, was studied by examining the interaction of parental behaviors and peers. According to this theory, violent parental behaviors are associated with the likelihood of the adolescent having friends that are delinquent or abuse drugs or alcohol. An indirect link between exposure to violence as a child and dating violence in adolescence may be supported by Miller, Gorman-Smith, Sullivan, Orpinas, and Simon (2009). Miller and colleagues (2009) examined the effects of both parents and peers on physical dating violence perpetration in adolescence, focusing on the early stage of adolescence since previous research suggested that
adolescents who begin dating earlier have higher rates of antisocial behavior \((N = 2,824)\). The female participants whose parents supported non-aggressive solutions to conflict reported less physical dating violence, in contrast to the girls who had deviant friends and parents that did not support non-aggressive problem solving, who were the most likely to report perpetrating physical dating violence. Since females who were exposed to interparental violence were at a higher risk for dating violence perpetration in these cases, theories that suggest violence occurs due to traditional gender-based beliefs and internalized rationalization for victimization in females are put into question. An antisocial framework might indicate that parental support for pro-social behaviors, such as non-aggressive means for solving conflict, may act as a protective factor against antisocial friends and perpetration of violence.

Tyler and colleagues (2011) integrated social cognitive theory and antisocial orientation theory to examine the effects of child maltreatment on dating violence perpetration and victimization in adolescents \((N = 900)\). Low parental warmth and child abuse were both associated with higher levels of substance abuse and delinquency. Adolescents of both genders who experienced neglect, low parental warmth, or engaged in delinquent behaviors were more likely to perpetrate dating violence. Adolescents who experienced low parental warmth, physical abuse from parents, or engaged in delinquent behaviors were more likely to be victims of dating violence. Since child abuse was related to victimization, this may suggest an internalized rationalization for violence against the self rather than against a specific gender. Females were more likely to report perpetrating dating violence against a partner. Since females often report both perpetration and victimization, future studies might investigate cycles of violence.
within dating relationships in which both partners are violent, as well as the variable of physical violence as self-defense. The study by Tyler et al. supported both of the theories utilized, which might indicate that childhood maltreatment is directly linked to adolescent dating violence through modeling of parental behaviors and internalized rationalizations, and indirectly linked through antisocial behaviors (i.e., substance abuse and delinquency).

Researchers found that exposure to family violence was a predictive factor for dating violence in Black adolescents but not for White adolescents, and there were also intragroup differences based on family structure and the mothers' educational level (Foshee, Ennett, Bauman, Benefield, and Suchindran, 2005). For example, corporal punishment was predictive of dating violence perpetration by Black adolescents that lived in two-parent households, but not for those who lived in one-parent households. They also found that witnessing violence between parents was a predictive factor for dating violence perpetration in Black adolescents that lived in a one-parent household, but not for those that lived in a two-parent household. Corporal punishment by a mother with a low level of education was a predictive factor for dating violence in Black adolescents, but it was a protective factor if the mother had a high level of education. Foshee et al. (2005) stressed the importance of researching the developmental processes of minority children and adolescents, as well as intragroup variation, but the results of their study also highlight the complexity of the interaction between variables that predict or protect against adolescent dating violence. Differences found between cultures and within cultures might be attributed to contextual and environmental variables such as community violence, access to resources, and community standards.
Based on a cultural meaning framework, these differences might also be attributed to the meanings that adolescents ascribe to parental behaviors. Whereas a social learning perspective might predict that adolescents would see marital violence and corporal punishment as an effective way to control the behavior of another person, cultural meaning theory posits that adolescents may perceive violent parental behaviors as either hostile or loving. Those who perceive the violence as hostile may feel rage that is released towards someone who is perceived to be nonthreatening, such as a romantic partner. Adolescents who perceive parental violence as an act of love might not feel anger or rage, and the meanings ascribed might be based on cultural and environmental factors. Acculturation gaps and differing values between parents and their children, to be discussed later, may also play a crucial role in this meaning making process.

Although certain parental behaviors may be risk factors for adolescent DV, parental influence could also act as a protective factor against other environmental risks. Parental and familial support, conceptualized as behaviors that foster a sense of mattering and belonging through communication, reciprocity, responsiveness, and warmth, can protect against risk factors for adolescent DV because of the significant influence on the formation of relationships with "prosocial" peers (Coker & Borders, 2001). Parental monitoring may also moderate the influence of deviant peers on substance use, and parental support for non-aggressive solutions was negatively associated with dating violence among females (Miller et al., 2009). Parents may express their desire to keep their daughters safe from physical and sexual violence through discussions about healthy relationships (Akers et al., 2011). In exploring
African American families \((N = 125\) individuals, 52 families), Akers and colleagues found that many parents reported using examples from their families, communities, or the media to educate their children on the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships. Although the study focused on the content and not the effectiveness of the parent's involvement, high parental warmth, parental attitudes favoring nonviolent conflict resolution, and the adolescent's sense of mattering may act as protective factors against dating violence. From the standpoint of an antisocial orientation model, these parental behaviors may act as a protective factor for dating violence by protecting adolescents from other risk factors \((i.e.,\) substance abuse and delinquency).

For American Indian adolescents, family influence has been demonstrated as the most prominent predictive factor of substance use, but it is also a significant protective factor \((Hurdle, Okamoto, & Miles, 2003)\). For this population, family is conceptualized as immediate family and extended family because extended family members may take on parental roles, and all members of a clan or kinship system may participate in child-rearing in some tribes. Witnessing adult relatives using substances or being directly encouraged to use substances by adult relatives was strongly linked to substance use by female adolescents. Interestingly, the researchers noted the pronounced effect of cousins on adolescent substance use in American Indian adolescents, as they are members of both the family and the peer group.

**Peer Influences**

Antisocial orientation theory might suggest that adolescents who have been victims of parental abuse or neglect may still be protected from dating violence through other factors that protect against delinquency and substance use. These protective factors may be growth-fostering relationships with non-parental adults and pro-social
peers, a positive school climate, or access to extracurricular activities at school and in the community (Coker & Borders, 2001; Liang, Tracy, Kenny, Brogan, & Gatha, 2010). Liang et al. (2010) used a relational-cultural model to develop an assessment called the Relational Health Indices for Youth, and the theory posits that there is a strong relationship between growth-fostering relationships and psychological well-being. Growth-fostering relationships are defined as those that involve mutual engagement, authenticity, empowerment, and the ability to deal with conflict. Liang and colleagues found that growth-fostering relationships with peers were significantly associated with higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression ($N = 188$). Growth-fostering relationships with mentors were associated with lower levels of stress. These types of growth-fostering relationships may act as protective factors against the intergenerational transmission of risk by increasing self-esteem, teaching non-aggressive types of conflict resolution, and reducing anxiety and depression.

Relationships with peers play an important socializing role for adolescents and norms for behavior are set within a peer social context. Relationships between genders increase, and teens may feel emotionally closer to their peers than to their families. Adolescents also become more aware of their social and romantic identities. Possibly because peer groups set standards for acceptable behavior, self-reported dating violence by adolescents between the ages of 14 and 20 is associated with the number of friends who engage in dating violence and the frequency of that behavior (Miller et al., 2009).

An emerging variable in adolescent socialization and relationships is that of electronic aggression (EA). As of 2006, 93% of adolescents between the ages of 12 and
17 had internet access, and 71% owned cellular phones. (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010). Electronic media offer adolescents new outlets for practicing self-representation and self-disclosure. It can also create a larger social network, as well as depersonalizing communication and offering a sense of anonymity that may increase sexist, racist, homophobic, and aggressive behaviors. EA includes harassment, bullying, starting rumors, verbal or emotional abuse, and making threats. EA increased by 50% between 2000 and 2005, and it is associated with negative psychological and social outcomes including academic problems, depression, anxiety, interpersonal victimization, and EA perpetration against others (Draucker & Martsolf, 2010). In adolescent romantic relationships, electronic communication devices can be used to perpetuate dating violence through manipulative, controlling, or stalking behaviors and verbal and emotional abuse. Electronic communication devices might also be used to perpetuate the type of violent event labeled by Stephenson, Martsolf, and Draucker (2011) as Rejecting/Ignoing/Disrespecting. As a way to inflict emotional abuse, an adolescent may ignore their partner by turning their phone off or refusing to answer calls as a form of punishment. An abusive partner also might give their partner the silent treatment by ignoring them on social networking sites, but continuing to publicly communicate with other members of their peer group. Additional research is needed to determine the relationship between EA and other types of adolescent dating violence and whether it differs by gender.

Proximal antecedents were identified in a study that was conducted to develop a theoretical framework for explaining and predicting adolescent DV (Stephenson et al., 2001). The precursors to violent events identified were pulling away, demanding
obedience, discovery of involvement with a rival, an attempt to define the relationship, and demonstrating disrespect. These precursors predicted perpetration of DV for both genders. Since the five proximal antecedents are all related to power and control, the feelings of insecurity typical in adolescence may be a factor. Foshee et al. (2009) found that perpetration of physical and sexual dating violence peak at age 16.3 for both genders and then begin to decline, but it is still unclear why some adolescents continue to perpetrate dating violence in late adolescence or into adulthood.

**Societal Influence**

Some gender-based frameworks have been used in the study of adolescent dating violence, including the theory of gender and power (Stevens et al., 2010). This theory holds that societal and institutional structures play a role in the occurrence of dating violence. Structures such as division of labor, familial roles, media images, and settings in schools and in the workplace might create an unequal distribution of power between men and women, placing females in a role of greater vulnerability to violence. Since minority groups are also affected by inequities in societal and institutional structures, young adolescent girls of ethnic identity may be at a greater risk for experiencing dating violence victimization, particularly if the male partner is older and has multiple partners because this increases the power differential (Raiford et al., 2007). According to Raiford and colleagues (2007), some girls may have an inaccurate idea about what qualities encompass a healthy relationship because of social norms and media images, which might portray a female as having a strong emotional attachment to her male partner and as being accepting of controlling or aggressive behaviors. Exposure to pornographic movies may further perpetuate the gender-based belief that females should be submissive to men. Since media images of ethnic minority females
are often stereotypical and dehumanizing, exposure to pornography may also be more 
detrimental for adolescent females from an ethnic minority group.

Exposure to community violence may play a role in adolescent DV as well. 
McKelvey, Whiteside-Mansell, Bradley, Casey, Conners-Burrow, and Barrett (2011) 
found that community violence was associated with depression and anxiety for female 
adolescents even if they lived in low-conflict homes, although symptomology was higher 
for females in high conflict homes. McKelvey and colleagues (2011) hypothesized that a 
positive home environment would act as a protective factor against the negative effects 
of community violence, but this was not supported by their results. Since internalizing 
behaviors such as anxiety and depression might be risk factors for dating violence, this 
suggests a need for early intervention with adolescents exposed to community violence 
even if parental behaviors are positive.

**Multicultural Aspects**

Diverse cultural influences add even more complexity to the issues of adolescent 
development and adolescent DV. Variables such as levels of acculturation, 
acculturation gaps, family structure, family values, religion, gender roles, and sexual 
orientation can all effect the beliefs and behaviors of adolescents. The nuances of the 
adolescent’s experience, as well as the effects of societal and systemic oppression, are 
critical factors in development. Different cultural aspects must be examined in order to 
discuss adolescent DV from a holistic perspective.

Smokowski, Rose, and Bacallao (2008) examined how differences in 
acculturation levels of Latino parents and children can affect family dynamics ($N = 402$ 
families). When a child becomes more assimilated to the dominant culture than their 
parents, the result can be an acculturation gap, and, if the differences in the two
cultures cannot be reconciled, the result can be an acculturation conflict. Acculturation conflicts were a risk factor for lower family cohesion, as well as conflict between the parent and the adolescent. Since parental involvement may serve as a protective factor against substance abuse, delinquency, and dating violence, acculturation conflict may be an indirect risk factor because of its effect on parent-adolescent conflict. Qin (2008) also examined the effects of acculturation on family dynamics and adolescent development of Asian American immigrants (N = 38). She hypothesized that the "achievement/adjustment paradox" (when a student has high levels of academic achievement and low levels of psychological adjustment) would be moderated by the parent-child relationship after migration to the U.S. She conducted a qualitative study and found that psychologically distressed students reported feeling more emotional alienated from their parents than non-distressed students. Parents of students who felt distressed were more likely to have maintained their previous parenting practices from before migration to the U.S., which caused acculturation conflicts as their children became more assimilated into the dominant culture. According to Qin, the parents of the non-distressed students were more flexible and made adjustments to their parenting practices based on the acculturation of their children, lowering the risk of acculturation conflict. More open communication and democratic decision making were also apparent in the relationships between parents and non-distressed students, which could indicate that reciprocity and a sense of mattering enhanced the students' well-being. This type of open communication and tolerance for differences might also teach the child a non-aggressive style of handling conflicts, which may be a protective factor against adolescent DV.
Acculturation gaps may also affect the meaning that adolescents ascribe to certain parental behaviors. If high levels of parental control or aggressive forms of conflict resolution are considered normative in the culture-of-origin, adolescents may begin to perceive them as hostile or oppressive as they become assimilated into the dominant culture of their schools and peer groups. This may lead to anger and hostility in the adolescent which could potentially be directed toward a friend or romantic partner. However, if an adolescent perceives a parent's high-control or aggressive behaviors as a loving way of eliciting desired behaviors from the child, there is a possibility that she or he may be more accepting of controlling or aggressive behaviors from a partner.

Similar to acculturation, religiosity of the family may also act as a protective factor or a risk factor depending upon the level of difference between the parent and child. Pearce and Haynie (2004) studied the effect of religion on adolescent delinquency and found that it acted as a protective factor when the adolescent and parents shared religious beliefs ($N = 10.444$). However, religion was a risk factor for delinquency when beliefs conflicted. The researchers posited that religious conflicts often lead to violence. Their own research results suggested that delinquency rates were lowest when a mother and adolescent child were both very religious, and the highest rates of delinquency were associated with religious dissimilarity (religious mother with a non-religious child, or a religious child with a non-religious mother). In general, similarity in religious beliefs were associated with lower delinquency, even if parents and the child were both non-religious. This has implications for adolescent DV since delinquency is thought to be a risk factor for both victimization and perpetration. Adolescents with similar religious beliefs to their parents might feel more comfortable with a higher level
of parental involvement in their lives compared to those who differ, and sharing religious beliefs could also contribute to a stronger sense of belonging.

Although little research has been done on adolescent DV in same-sex relationships, prevalence rates are expected to be similar to those found in opposite-sex relationships. Researchers suggest that men and women are expected to engage in different behaviors based on social norms regarding gender, and that self-reports of intimate partner violence would be biased in accordance with these norms (Stevens et al., 2010). Stevens and colleagues suggested that to understand IPV in same-sex relationships, theories should be developed that explore power differentials in relationships that exist regardless of gender. They posited that women would be less likely to report physical aggression against a partner and more likely to report verbal abuse towards a partner, which could be more socially acceptable for a woman because it aligns with the stereotype of the female as the nurturer and protector of the relationship. Verbal abuse can be seen as a sign of an emotional commitment to the relationship. Stevens et al. (2010) found that IPV prevalence rates among women did not vary based on sexual orientation, and the prevalence rates for specific behaviors were mostly similar whether the women had a female partner or a male partner.

There is limited research on adolescent dating violence within the LGBTQIQ population, despite the critical importance for counselors. Davis, Williamson, and Lambie (2008) reported that LGBT adolescents are the largest minority group within many schools, and that LGBT adolescents face even more negative issues than adults within the LGBT community. Moreover, LGBT adolescents are more likely to attempt suicide, commit suicide, be victimized by bullying, skip school because of fears about
their safety, experience depression, and experience substance abuse compared to their heterosexual peers (Davis et al., 2008; Craig, 2013). Additionally, LGBT adolescents have a higher risk of academic difficulties, homelessness, running away, social isolation, sexually transmitted diseases, and interpersonal difficulties with peers (Davis et al., 2008; Craig, 2013). However, Davis et al. (2008) stressed the importance of recognizing that most LGBT adolescents become healthy adults despite these experiences and risks. Though not all LGBT adolescents will experience these challenges, several of the risk factors mentioned above (past victimization, depression, substance abuse) have been associated with adolescent dating violence. Furthermore, dating violence victimization may compound the effects of the negative stressors that LGBT adolescents already experience (Akers et al., 2010; Stephenson et al., 2011; Stevens et al., 2010).

Craig (2013) explored the challenges of LGBT adolescents through a minority stress theory, suggesting that experiences of discrimination lead to increased risks, and that this may be compounded for LGBT adolescents of color who experience racism and ethnic discrimination. According to this model, the adolescent’s sense of self is in conflict with the expectations of society, and the resulting stress puts the adolescent at risk for mental health issues such as depression, and LGBT adolescents of color may experience this conflict and stress from multiple different sources (Craig, 2013). Craig provided a theoretical framework for a strengths-based affirmative approach for working with LGBT adolescents with dual or multiple minority statuses in a school-based counseling group. Craig’s model emphasized social justice, an affirmative stance, and a focus on the strengths and resiliencies of adolescents, their communities, and their
cultures that may foster empowerment and lower the risk for negative mental health outcomes caused by minority stress. Craig’s model, which was developed after conducting a needs assessment, was implemented in 15 schools with 263 adolescents. Craig proposed the following critical practices for school counselors working with LGBT youth to consider: a) “Make groups accessible”, b) “Highlight strengths in every session”, c) “Integrate affirmative content”, d) “Attend to intersecting identities”, e) “Creatively engage families”, and f) “Consider cognitive behavioral strategies” (pp 379 -381).

Murray, Mobley, Buford, and Seaman-DeJohn (2008) conducted a review of the existing literature on IPV within same-sex relationships and provided implications for counseling professionals. They discussed the challenge of recruiting participants for research in this area and refer to the “double closet” that victims of IPV in same-sex relationships may experience, which may lead potential participants to be hesitant to share their stories with researchers, and even to seek help or speak about their experiences with clinicians. This poses a significant issues for professional counselors given that Murray and colleagues (2008) found prevalence rates of IPV ranging from one quarter to one half of all same-sex relationships. Yet, they did not find research on the outcomes of treatment approaches/models for same-sex IPV while conducting their literature review, further highlighting this need in clinical services literature.

Though previous research on LGBT adolescents and dating violence was not found, conceptualization of the factors that protect against the risk of suicide for LGB adolescents may be helpful in understanding how adolescents cope with significant stressors. Rutter (2008) proposed the Cumulative Factor Model for conceptualizing protective factors and risk factors associated with LGB adolescent suicide. Rutter
proposed this theoretical framework and suggested that social support, resilience, and optimism will protect against the risk of suicide and mitigate the effects of mental health issues, substance abuse, and victimization and abuse related to sexual identity.

Given that IPV may occur in similar rates in same-sex couples and heterosexual couples, it is important for counselors to examine adolescent DV among same-sex couples because of the impact on psychosocial development and well-being. Adolescents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQIQ) may already have more struggles in terms of identity development and interpersonal relationship development compared to heterosexual adolescents because of the stigma and discrimination that still exists. Additionally, LGBTQIQ adolescents may be less likely to report dating violence victimization if it comes with the added impact of coming out to friends, family, or non-parental adults in order to seek help or advice. Therefore, culturally-sensitive research is needed to help develop prevention and intervention strategies for this vulnerable population based on strengths and assets.
CHAPTER 2
METHODS

Research Design

This study was designed using a qualitative, phenomenological approach. In phenomenological research, researchers seek to understand the common themes, or essence, of the participants’ experiences related to a specific phenomenon. This approach was chosen for this study because the researcher sought to understand and describe the lived experiences of the participants who overcame adolescent dating violence with a same-sex/same-gender partner during adolescence. Rather than explaining why a phenomenon occurs, phenomenological research is intended to explore what occurred and how it occurred (what and in what context) in an effort to better understand the participants’ lived experiences and the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2008). This method was chosen in order to address the gap in the literature related to the strengths and resiliencies lesbian and bisexual females utilized to overcome adolescent dating violence. Because of the lack of research in this area, this strengths-based approach allows those who have lived through the phenomenon to explain “what” and “how” in their own words, thus empowering them to have a part in the contribution to the literature.

Participants

Participants identified as having experienced dating violence during adolescence in a relationship with a partner of the same sex or gender. Participants determined independently upon viewing recruitment materials that they qualified as participants for the study, and they contacted the researcher directly about participating in the study. Two participants were interviewed for this study. Both participants identified their gender
as female and indicated that they were in a violent or abusive relationship with another female during adolescence. At the time of the interview, participants were over the age of 18 and were currently enrolled in a university; one participant was 21 years old, the other declined to share her age but indicated she was over 18. One participant self-identified as lesbian and the other identified as bisexual. One participant self-identified her race/ethnicity as White/Native American and Hispanic/Latino. The other participant identified her race/ethnicity as Caucasian.

Little information was gathered about the participants in order to protect their identities. Both participants were actively involved in the LGBT community on campus. Both participants were in an abusive relationship at the age of 18, during their final year of high school. One participant ended the relationship with her past partner when she moved away for college, and the other participant ended the relationship with her past partner shortly after moving for college. One participant stated that she had experienced emotional abuse, and the other participant did not specify the type of abuse she experienced. To protect the participants from possible distress, and to keep the focus of this study on strengths and resiliencies utilized to overcome the past relationship, the specifics of what happened in the abusive relationships were not explored in depth. Though the researcher did ask how the participants believe the abusive relationship impacted their development, participants were not specifically asked about their sexual identity development or where they were in this process at the time of the relationship.

Instrumentation

Participants were interviewed individually using a semi-structured format. Questions were open ended, including those on the self-report demographic form,
which allowed participants to provide preferred identifiers rather than checking boxes for pre-conceived notions of age, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Interview questions were developed based on strengths, resiliencies, challenges, and cultural implications highlighted in the existing literature. In line with phenomenological methodology, the researcher engaged in the process of “bracketing” beliefs and biases based on past experiences through conversation and reflection (Creswell, 2008). The interview questions developed were presented to a mixed-level research team comprised of master’s and doctoral students in counselor education and one counselor educator. The researcher was given feedback and encouraged to spend more time examining personal biases and beliefs, including internalized deficit-oriented beliefs, related to the topic. The researcher discussed her life experiences and related beliefs with members of the research team over several weeks and also reflected on past experiences through journaling. The researcher then adapted the interview questions to be more aligned with a strengths-based perspective. The final questions were presented to a committee of three counselor educators for further feedback. Once all changes were made and approved by the committee members, they were submitted to and approved by the institutional review board (IRB) (Appendix C.)

**Procedures**

This study was conducted on campus at a large university in the southeastern United States. Participants (n = 2) were recruited through an on-campus LGBT affairs office. IRB-approved fliers (Appendix F) were posted at the office of LGBT affairs, and a recruitment email (Appendix G) was sent through a listserv maintained by the office of LGBT affairs and through the listserv for the counselor education program. Participants were asked to contact the researcher directly, either by email or phone, if they were
interested in participating in the study. It was explicitly stated that participants had to be at least 18 years old to be involved in the study. A $25 Starbucks gift card was offered to participants to thank them for their time.

The researcher held individual interviews with each participant after obtaining voluntary consent from the participants. The informed consent (Appendix A) included phone numbers for two free counseling resources in the local area in case participants experienced distress during or after the interview. Participants were informed that they could stop the interview and retract themselves from the study at any time. The participants were also asked to complete a demographics questionnaire (Appendix D).

To assess for the potential of emotional or psychological distress as a result of participation in this study, screening questions (Appendix B) were asked to determine whether they were currently involved in an abusive relationship; both participants stated that they were not.

Participants were interviewed individually using the IRB approved interview questions and follow-up questions. Each interview was audio recorded. After the interview, the researcher and participants discussed the experience of being interviewed about their story and participants were again informed of the free counseling services available in the community. Participants were invited to meet for one additional meeting to review the themes found for the purpose of member-checking or respondent validation (Creswell, 2007.) This process allows the participant to have a voice in the data analysis process. One participant chose to meet with the researcher for the purposes of member-checking. The participant agreed with the themes found by the researcher and approved of the selected quotes/significant statements.
Data Analysis

After the completion of the interviews, the recordings were transcribed for analysis. The researcher read through the verbatim transcripts several times before choosing significant statements, as per phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2007.) The significant statements were then categorized into meaning units, or themes, that were common to all participants.

Researcher

I, the primary researcher, am a master’s student in a mental health counseling program. I personally identify as a Caucasian, bisexual or pansexual female. Pansexuality, simple put, refers to a fluid sexual orientation in which one may be attracted to a person of any gender or sex, whether they identify as male, female, transgender, genderqueer (non-binary,) or other. I have life experiences with both heterosexism, as well as intimate partner violence. To reduce the potential for bias in this study, I engaged in the process of bracketing (as described in the procedures section) to set aside my beliefs and biases as much as possible before beginning data collection. I also discussed my life experiences and the perceived impact on my development and worldview with peers in the counselor education program. To the best of my ability, I have implemented procedures to enhance the trustworthiness of this study.

Verification Procedure

The researcher utilized verification procedures common in strengths-based qualitative methodologies, as described by Creswell (2007). First, the researcher engaged in the process of bracketing prior to data collection. Data was analyzed and categorized into significant statements and themes and the reviewed by another
researcher. The researcher then presented the themes to one of the participants for the purposes of member-checking.
CHAPTER 3
RESULTS

The researcher found six themes related to strengths and resiliencies and one theme related to challenges in receiving either support or services. The themes related to strengths and resiliencies were a) goals, b) support/trust, c) validation/relating to others, d) self as a priority/boundaries and e) values. The theme for challenges was lack of cultural competence/marginalization.

Goals

The first theme, goals, is related to the resiliency that participants found in thinking about their academic achievements and plans. One participant stated, in talking about removing herself from an abusive situations, “It was like a realization that it isn’t worth it, I have school to focus on.” Another participant shared her experience with finding strength in future plans and academic goals:

I did have teachers that encouraged me to apply to college and be more academically accomplished. And those relationships that I had prior [to the abusive relationship] kind of helped ground me. So it was kind of a beneficial structure because I knew there was some kind of standard to meet and it was a goal I could actually reach…They gave me a framework of, you know, ‘you’re academically talented, if you just keep pushing through you’re going to be able to reap the benefits, and ultimately I was able to move away and to go to school away from…that whole situation. And so it definitely did pay off.

Support and encouragement from others was also reported as being beneficial, in that it related to the development of future plans and goals. One participant stated,

The societal pressure just to be academically successful and go to college kind of helped, but it was more the pressure from my high school teachers and mentors to push through that. I never really had a plan to pursue a Bachelor’s degree before I had those teachers.
Support/Trust

The second theme was related to the reactions from others when learning about the abusive relationship or discussing the impact it had on them. The participants were able to feel safe with and to trust people who offered encouragement and support. One participant described how her mother helped her to recognize the situation she was in and to cope with the end of the relationship. She stated, “She [my mother] kind of guided me towards the idea, and then I realized I was kind of being taken advantage of and it was making me sad all the time, and that kind of helped pull me out of that.” She identified that the support from her parents was a factor that helped her to overcome the situation. She commented, “My parents were really helpful. My mom was especially…She wasn’t like, ‘I told you so.’ She was really caring.” The participant further expressed, “I think it meant the most that my parents were there, because even though they didn’t like her from the get-go, they weren’t throwing it in my face…that was probably the most beneficial, to put everything back in perspective.”

In addition to parental support and encouragement that fostered trust and safety, relationships with non-parental adults and peers were also identified as helpful. One participant talked about how her teachers in high school provided a safe space for her when she needed encouragement but was not yet ready to discuss the abusive relationship: “I didn’t have to be so careful about what I shared because there were obvious student-teacher boundaries that needed to be respected and rules that I knew how to follow.” Furthermore, she expressed how she was able to receive support and encouragement from peers...
in college once she was removed from the abusive situation, particularly those from her own cultural background and from the LGBT community. She stated,

That was a bit of a struggle...the fact that I was very secretive and not very open about my emotional issues with them [my family], and my sexuality...being surrounded by healthy expression of romance and friendship just really helped me here [at college]...

Peer support definitely helped at that point. I was able to compare what was bad and what was good in my relationships, and when I came to college it was really stressed-- by various sources, by mentorship programs, by orientation, and a lot of the freshman introductory sources, the resources they have on campus-- it was stressed that, you need to network, you need to expand. It sort of gave me just a reason to push myself out there into areas I'm not comfortable with and I just sort of went with it until something clicked.

When asked what characteristics come to mind in relation to the most helpful or supportive people during this time, one participant stated,

They were really considerate and compassionate, and if I didn't want to talk about it and wanted to talk about something else, they were totally open to letting me get my mind off of it. And, you know, just enjoying everything else. We'd go out places, we'd do these things. They kept me active.

A subtheme of support and trust theme, *nurturing environment*, was related to daily interactions with others in various environments (i.e., school, work, home). One participant described how relationships with people she met at work, school, and in her dorm helped her to recognize that her past experience had been abusive in nature:

My college roommate helped a lot...and I found a job when I moved away and I confided in my supervisor. I wasn’t completely open with anyone, but those two helped me put the puzzle pieces together. Because I’m not a very open person to begin with, so it just made sense for me to channel it through different people to see if it was abuse, because, you know, I never told my family, I never explained anything...that wasn’t possible. Away from my surroundings, and with supportive people who were around me in a structured format, that really helped me realize exactly what I had gone through. ...I had my dorm, I knew that was my new home...it
was basically school, work, dorm. That structure I had created for myself outside of where I grew up really helped me realize just what issues I had been hiding…it wasn’t as easy to hide stuff from new people who pick up on different things. So that really helped.

Being around new people in a new environment also helped the participant to recognize different relational dynamics. She stated, “It’s just, you see yourself in different people, you see how different relationships are.” Another participant also discussed how her environment and supportive people who lived in close proximity helped her both to recognize that her relationship was abusive and to cope with the relationship ending by stating,

I sent a text to my roommates and my closest friends. Most of them came right over. After I was off the phone with my mom they were already there, so that was really nice. They were all really understanding and it was great having people to talk to immediately after, or at least have them in proximity and not talking about it. It’s like they already knew what was going on.

The participant further explained the importance of having supportive people nearby as the relationship was ending and after it ended. She stated, “It helped to [have] people in the immediate area…they’re really great, I have a lot of good friends that I can rely on.” She also expressed the importance of living in an environment that is nurturing and accepting of her sexual identity. She commented, “I’ve met a lot of people that either don’t care or are just super-allies…I feel like I’ve been really lucky, being in a college town kind of helps.”

Additionally, one participant expressed that she would have taken advantage of the counseling services offered by the university had she not had supportive people in the immediate area. She stated, “I probably would have gone just because I would have…to sit in a room and just cry in front of a person…I’d
rather not be alone in my room if I can be crying at somebody else.”

**Validation/Relating to Others**

Another resiliency factor that emerged from the data was validation of the experience and having other people who could relate to similar experiences. One participant found support in her current romantic relationship. On participant stated, “It’s really nice that [my current partner] can understand that I was in a crappy relationship and that [they were] also treated horribly and we both balance that whole situation.” This validation or ability to relate wasn’t only in regard to dating violence; one participant discussed how her best friend provided her strength while simultaneously coping with the effects of past trauma, and social and systemic marginalization related to race, class, and sexuality:

My first college friend…I opened up to her a lot and it that was really nice to be able to talk it out...She wasn't as shocked because she came from a very similar background... She had different dynamics going on, but she completely understood how it's like to grow up poor and with a struggling family and parents who do very traumatic things and, you know, struggle immensely to make sure that you reach adulthood...she became my best friend...It really gave me the opportunity to finally be open with things that I had just been pushing back.

**Self as a Priority/Boundaries**

The fourth theme is related to how the participants interact with others in their current relationships. The participants had a keen awareness of relationship dynamics due to their past experiences, and they recognized that they wanted to put themselves as a priority in their lives and to maintain healthy boundaries and freedom to make decisions (and to not feel guilty about their decisions) and to have their own thoughts and opinions. One participant stated,

I don't ever let [people] take advantage of me. I'm still giving, but it's to a point…I don't want to be expected to drop everything …But I
still hold to that I will go to my friend's side... I'm always there for my [partner], and [they are] always there for me.

Boundaries and the importance of putting oneself as a priority also came up when the participant was asked what she would want to share with someone who is currently in an abusive relationship: “If you're getting hurt, physically hurt, you need to like call the cops or get out of there in a way that's to not like have…him or her- anyone really- follow you, because your life is more important than that.”

Furthermore, one participant discussed putting herself as a priority and the importance of enforcing her own boundaries as she reflected on what she wishes she could share with her younger self. She remarked,

It's okay to prioritize myself first...It's okay to be open with yourself about what you need and just be diligent and follow through with whatever you can, forgive yourself for what you can't do. The other coin to being diligent is just it's okay to fail, just push through that.

She also shared how the freedom of choice and the flexibility provided to her by a mentorship program helped her to grow and find support during her time in college. She commented,

The relationship dynamics for mentorship wasn't structured so that there's an obvious goal, so that really helped...I could approach them for anything I wanted to...Everyone needs their own tailored resources, and the only way you can tailor resources is just to allow them to just talk to their mentor and go at their own pace about what they need from the university and what they need from their classes and what they need from their peers...Being able to have a choice to be myself was really helpful because I don't think I ever gave myself that option before, I never even thought of the possibility.

**Values**

The final strengths and resiliencies theme, *values*, encompassed personal, familial, and cultural values that were constant for the participants
before, during, and after the relationships. These values seemed to ground the participants in their sense of self as separate from the violence or abuse, thus impacting their identity and self-concept. One participant stated as a positive aspect of herself, “I think I’m really giving,” and went on to describe how the abusive relationship did not take this value from her. She stated,

I don't think [the relationship] really impacted my outlook on life. I still try to see people in the most positive way that I can, especially if I don't know them, there's no reason for me to think otherwise...I'm still a cheerful person, I don't act much different...I'm still pretty much me...I feel like I'm the same person...I feel like I went in the same person I am now, and initially came out pretty horrible, like always upset, and I definitely have gone back to almost exactly the same person that I was when I went in. So I feel like I'm more me now, I'm me again... I think I'm in a good place.

She explained how she learned the values of kindness from her family. She stated, “I do believe in being kind to people...going out of my way to be kind... My parents, they're both really considerate...and when I need them they're always there, so I think I learned that a lot from my family.”

Another participant expressed the value of honesty in terms of communicating her knowledge of relationship dynamics to those she cares about. She shared, “I won't censor myself from giving my opinion...a lot of people would turn a blind eye and ignore that...I just don't censor myself and my opinions about my friends' relationships... If I see any abuse...I definitely try to make [it] known.” Furthermore, she shared the importance of family and how it influences her life and her identity, which in turn influences her future plans and goals for herself, “Not only did I have to prove myself but I had to prove something of my family to the world, validate their struggle.”
Lack of Cultural Competence/Marginalization

The final theme emerged in discussions related to accessing resources, particularly counseling resources. Both participants expressed the importance of having a culturally competent counselor, and the participant who identified as Latina shared her insights related to lack of cultural competence and marginalization throughout the university. Additionally, she shared her experiences navigating what she called the “gap” between her parents’ culture and her own.

The first participant did not attempt to access counseling resources because she found the support she received from her family and friends to be helpful and preferred the trust and safety she already had in these relationships. However, she stated that she would have sought counseling if she did not have her support system or if they had been unavailable or physically distant while she was coping with the experience. She explained the process she would use in finding a counselor should she ever choose to do so, highlighting the importance of cultural competence and affirmative counseling. She stated,

I'd have to really extensively, like find a psychologist that understands gay relationships, and then make sure that they have good reviews online from people that have already gone to them for gay related things- that they understand what they're talking about. While I don't think lesbian relationships are much different, I don't want to be at a person who's really not- like, [who would] ignorantly advise me to not be in a same-sex relationship ever again…If I'd done more research, I might have gone.

The second participant explained how she did seek counseling services, and she believed that it was more harmful than helpful due to lack of cultural competence, and found the most support with her best friend. She commented,
One of the first counselors I saw there...totally blew past my family issues and was like “You should just be open to them,” and I was like “You're not culturally competent at all.”... There's not really a lot of help going to the counseling center if you know you can't always get in...There's just, you know, there's a lot of things that compound on each other, and it's those little things that just nick away at the independence that I've developed...it just sort of made me feel like I was reverting back...when I was finally able to be open with my best friend it just helped me to breath a lot easier... There are a lot of financial barriers...they opened everything up for me, but...the obstacles were really there too, you know, to completely heal myself... this isn't even just counseling, but across the board. You know, being a culturally competent person will just help you deal with things better...when I came here, I also had to become culturally competent in how the university culture works. And they're really good at training you how to be culturally competent in how to deal with them because they have a lot of programs, it's just like, how to be a great [university] student, be a student leader, but they don't teach it in reverse, you know, how to reciprocate that action.

She went on to describe her experiences of marginalization within the university culture in general, and how she believes it relates to her negative experiences with the counselor. She provided her insights on the detrimental effect that lack of cultural competence in a counselor can have on the clients they see. She stated,

It's not nice being a brown woman and not straight on game day. It's very hostile, and if you're by yourself it's incredibly traumatizing and scary... I'm automatically othered and that was another challenge. When I have someone like yelling slurs at me it just kind of reminds me of just how culturally incompetent some of my partners were in the relationships I had with them...for the time I was attending [university] [it] definitely didn't help because there were no people like me that were succeeding... It would be a lot nicer if there were a lot more prominent people of my background throughout [university]...it's very difficult separating yourself from “the other” here, and that sort of compounds getting over other issues when you are the other because no one knows how to approach you, which is the issue I had with my first counselor.
The researcher’s aim in conducting this study was to address a gap in the literature related to dating violence in same-sex relationships, while also providing a unique strengths-based perspective by focusing on resiliencies. The aspects related to cultural competence and marginalization that did not directly relate to the experiences of dating violence were included in the results because it highlights the importance of understanding the intersectionality of multiple identities and gives a more adequate view of the context. This is part of an important conversation for professional counselors and counselors-in-training to have related to what constitutes cultural competence (for example, is it a skill or a way of being? Is it a conscious or an unconscious process?) The six themes found were a) goals, b) support/trust, c) validation/relating to others, d) self as a priority/boundaries, e) values, and f) lack of cultural competence/marginalization.

The idea that goals may act as a protective factor against the potential negative outcomes related to adolescent dating violence could be related to the sense of mattering described by Coker and Borders (2001). This sense of having a plan for the future and a belief that one is capable of achieving significant goals may act as a resiliency factor by providing survivors a positive vision of the future to look forward to while they are experiencing trauma or the after-effects of trauma. Similarly, Rutter (2008) proposed that optimism may act as a protective factor against suicide for LGBT adolescents by mitigating the negative effects of bullying, substance abuse, and other risk factors. It’s possible that optimistic goals for the future, such as attending and graduating college, especially for a
first-generation college student, may mitigate some of the negative factors associated with adolescent dating violence victimization.

Support and trust may also relate to the framework provided by Rutter (2008). Along with optimism, Rutter proposed social support as a protective factor for LGBT youth suicide. Additionally, one of the participants expressed the importance of the support she received from her parents. Miller and colleagues (2009) found that parental monitoring and parental support for non-aggressive styles of conflict resolution was negatively associated with dating violence among adolescent females. Although the participant did experience dating violence, the support from her parents may have helped her to recognize the situation as abusive and to leave the relationship. Furthermore, Coker and Borders (2001) found parental and familial support- which includes communication, reciprocity, responsiveness, and warmth- to foster a sense of mattering and belonging for adolescents, as well as having a significant impact on relationship formation with prosocial peers. This participant identified the sense of support and mattering she experienced with her parents as the most beneficial resiliency factor in overcoming her abusive relationship.

Peers also offered trust and support for the participants during and after their relationships. Rutter (2008) identified social support as one of the main resiliency factors for LGBT adolescent suicide. Additionally, Liang and colleagues (2010) identified growth-fostering relationships with peers and mentors-relationships which involve mutual engagement, empowerment, authenticity, and ability to deal with conflict- as being significantly associated with adolescent well-being, particularly higher self-esteem and lower levels of depression. For the
participants of this study, support and trust were exemplified through reactions to learning about abusive experiences and through behaviors that allowed the participants to share openly, to have a choice about what they shared, and to engage in prosocial activities according to their own comfort level. These experiences described by the participants seem to involve authenticity, empowerment, and mutual engagement. In regard to the subtheme, nurturing environment, the physical proximity was important to the participants because they were able to choose not to be alone and they were able to engage in activities with others. It could also be interesting to note that physical proximity away from the perpetrator may also have been beneficial, as both participants had moved away on their own for college, but this construct was not explored in depth during these interviews.

Validation was an important theme mentioned by both participants. It was related to having close friends or role models who had similar experiences or came from similar backgrounds. Though none of the previous literature reviewed specifically mentioned the construct of validation, Akers and colleagues (2011) did explore how African American parents utilized examples of healthy relationships from their families, their communities, and from the media to offer examples that their daughters could relate to. Additionally, Craig (2013) proposed the importance of highlighting strengths in every session, integrating affirmative content, attending to intersecting identities, and creatively engaging families when conducting group work with LGBT adolescents, and these constructs may be related to validation of self and culture.
Furthermore, the theme of *self as a priority/boundaries* may also relate to the model proposed by Craig (2013). By becoming aware of strengths and affirming oneself, participants were able to see themselves as valuable and capable. This new self-concept led to a better understanding of their own personal boundaries and what they will or will not accept in relationships. This may also be tied to the sense of mattering discussed by Coker and Borders (2001). It appears that this theme of putting the self as a priority and setting boundaries does not come from an individualistic viewpoint, but rather comes from a sense of connection to a community and the belief that one has value and something of value to offer to others. As we saw in the values theme, the participants were able to integrate what they learned from a negative experience into the motivation to advocate for others, to support others, and to offer kindness and compassion to others. Thus, putting self as a priority and having goals for themselves allowed the participants to act as strength and resiliency factors for other people who have experienced or may experience dating violence. The values that the participants expressed were related to being kind to others and speaking out for others, and they were cultural values in that they were shared either by parents, mentors, peers, or a larger community.

The theme *lack of cultural competence/marginalization* offered an alternative perspective to the strength and resiliency themes; it highlighted how non-supportive relationships, even those that may be unintentionally unsupportive as was the case with the counselor, can be detrimental to people who are actively coping with and seeking help for past trauma. This theme further exemplifies the importance of cultural competence as a core component of an
effective counseling relationship. As Craig (2013) stated, it is vital for counselors to attend to intersecting identities and to include affirmative content when working with LGBT adolescents, and especially LGBT adolescents of color who may be experiencing discrimination on multiple levels and from multiple sources.

**Implications**

This study has implications for LGB affirmative counseling, multicultural counseling, and counseling with people who have experienced dating violence. First, the importance of trust and safety were present throughout the results as factors that were helpful to the participants. This has implications for the counseling relationship, but it also may suggest that bringing supportive friends and family into the counseling process may create a more comfortable environment for the client, compared to a traditional, one-on-one counseling session. This may be supported by assertions by Craig (2013) who recommended working with youth in a group setting and creatively engaging families in the process. Furthermore, the communal nature of the themes and the importance of cultural competence may suggest that counselors who are both culturally competent and visible public advocates for LGB people (whether they are LGB themselves or allies) will be better able to establish a strong therapeutic bond grounded in support, encouragement, and trust. The importance of understanding the intersectionality of identities and culture is also necessary for counselors to consider when working with clients. Finally, the strengths and resiliencies that were beneficial to these participants may also act as protective factors for people who experienced dating violence regardless of their gender or sexual orientation, but further research is warranted to explore how the process
is different for those who identify as lesbian or bisexual and those who identify as straight.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. As with all qualitative research, the results are not intended to be generalizable. Furthermore, though the researcher sought to investigate how strengths and resiliencies may buffer the negative effects often associated with adolescent dating violence (depression, substance abuse, suicidal ideation, etc.), the researcher did not ask about these negative effects, and therefore cannot state with certainty that the strengths and resiliencies protected against them. An important limitation to note is that the participants were not specifically asked how their experiences were or might be different from those of straight/heterosexual females who experienced adolescent dating violence. It would also have been helpful to gather more information about what this experience is like for lesbian and bisexual females of color and the intersection of identities. Similarly, the participants were not asked about their sexual identity development, where they were in their sexual identity development at the time of the abusive relationship, or how the experience may have impacted their sexual identity development. Additionally, the reflective nature may be a limitation since the participants were interviewed several years after the experience of dating violence occurred. Finally, a limitation of this study is that there were only two participants.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

In the future, researchers may want to conduct similar research with a larger group of participants, as well as with participants from many different cultural
backgrounds. It could be important to explore this experience through the lens of the minority stress model and how multiple minority identities interact with the “double closet” of being both LGB and a survivor of dating violence (Craig, 2013; Murray et al., 2008). Moreover, researchers may want to include people who identify as male, transgender, or non-binary in future studies. Additionally, it may be helpful in future research to ask specifically about the negative outcomes typically associated with adolescent dating violence and whether those effects were mediated or eliminated once the protective factors were introduced.

Further, for purposes of generalizability, a measure may be developed using the themes found in this research and other research on LGB coping resources and resiliencies so that quantitative studies can be conducted. If the themes were found to be generalizable, it could be beneficial for the field of LGB counseling, particularly for adolescent clients who may not have support. Finally, in the future researchers who conduct similar studies may want to ask specifically about how the proximity to or away from the perpetrator impacted their healing process.

**Conclusion**

In summary, it appears that a combination of multiple protective factors offered support to the participants in their process of overcoming dating violence during adolescence. Though qualitative research is not generalizable, the themes that emerged are a starting point for understanding the phenomenon of strengths and resiliencies that can help lesbian and bisexual females overcome adolescent dating violence. It was not surprising that the importance of cultural competence emerged, as this is a core competency for professional counselors. Further research on strengths, resiliencies, and affirmative counseling can help further
advance the field as one that supports a paradigm of social justice and human rights.
Informed Consent

Study Title: Exploring the Strengths, Resiliencies and Challenges of Lesbian and Bisexual Females Who Experienced Dating Violence in a Same-Sex Relationship During Adolescence

Purpose
The purpose of this study is to explore the strengths, resiliencies, resources, and challenges of lesbian and bisexual female adolescents who have past experience of dating violence in a same-sex relationship.

Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked questions about your past experiences, including your strengths and the support systems you had while you were in a violent or abusive relationship. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Once the audio recording has been transferred to an encrypted flashdrive and an encrypted UF server, it will be deleted from the audio recorder. Once the audio recordings have been transcribed, the audio will be destroyed. No identifying information about you (such as your name) will be included in the transcription. The interview will take approximately one hour. After analysis of the data, I will ask you to verify the accuracy of my data analysis. I will present to you what I found in common among all participants' data. This information will be presented without identifying your name or any other identifying information about you or other participants. You will have the opportunity to correct or clarify any information that you don't fully agree with. Your total time commitment will be approximately two hours should you choose to complete the study.

Confidentiality
Some direct quotes may be used in publication of study; however, they will be anonymous and therefore not connected with your name or identifying information. Please keep this in mind when deciding to tell anyone that you are participating in this study, because people you know may be able to guess which quotes belong to you if they know you participated. To protect privacy and confidentiality, please do not mention names of other people or other identifying information about them during our interviews. Limits to confidentiality include abuse of a minor, a person who is disabled, or a person who is elderly (this can include past abuse if it has not yet been reported). Confidentiality can be broken if you are a danger to yourself or others or if ordered by a court of law. Your identity and information will be held confidential to the extent provided by law. If you choose to participate and sign the consent form, the form will be held in a folder separate from other documents. Signed consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be identified by a number assigned to you and will not be associated with your name or any identifying information. Audio recordings will be transferred to a password-protected flashdrive and a secure UF server within 12 hours of recording and will then be deleted from the recording device. Recordings of our interviews will be
transcribed into a word-processing document and the audio recording will then be destroyed. Audio files and transcriptions will be identified by a number assigned to you and will not be associated with your name or any identifying information. One other graduate student or a faculty member will have access to the transcribed documents to assist with data analysis, but they will not hear the audio recordings. Your name and identifying information will not be associated with the transcripts; and therefore your identity will not be revealed to these individuals.

**Potential Risks**
Due to the nature of the topic, you might experience emotional or psychological distress. Should you experience distress during or after the interviews, please let me know as soon as possible so that the interview can be stopped. We will discuss your experience together, and you can decide if you would like to be referred to counseling services. Counseling services are offered to University of Florida students free of charge at the Counseling & Wellness Center. They can be contacted at 352-392-1575. Since there can be a wait-time for intake sessions, you may want to schedule an appointment as soon as possible if you think that you might be interested. Walk-in appointments are also available, and there are phone counselors available to talk to you after hours if you call the main number. (352) 392-1575

**Potential Benefits**
You might gain a greater awareness of your strengths, resiliencies, and coping skills through the experience. The results of the study will also contribute to the knowledge base of counselor researchers and may lead to further studies that will inform counseling practice.

**Participant's Rights**
Your participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You also have the right to stop the interview at any point, and to withdraw from the study should you choose.

**Compensation**
You will not receive any compensation for participating in the study.

**Access to Results**
Should you be interested in following up on the study after completion, please contact me at Rachelp@ufl.edu after April 2014.

**Questions or Concerns**
If you have other questions, concerns, or complaints that I have not addressed to your satisfaction, please contact me, Rachel Henesy at rachelp@ufl.edu or my faculty advisor, Dr. Edil Torres-Rivera at edil0001@coes.ufl.edu.

To learn more about your rights as a participant, contact the University of Florida Institutional Review Board, at IRB02 Office, Box 112250, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611-2250; phone 392-0433.
For counseling services, please contact the Counseling & Wellness Center at 352-392-1575.

Participation Agreement:
I have read and understand the procedures explained above. I choose to voluntarily participate in the study and I have received a copy of the informed consent.

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
Principal Investigator’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
APPENDIX B
SCREENING QUESTIONS
Screening Questions

1. Were you in a relationship with a same-sex partner between the ages of 14 and 18 that was psychologically, emotionally, physically, or sexually abusive?

2. Did you and your partner both identify as female?

3. Are you currently in a relationship that could be characterized as violent or abusive, or do you frequently feel disrespected by your partner? (If yes, refer to CWC. Don't continue study with participant.)
Interview Questions

1. Who or what helped you to realize that your relationship was abusive in nature?
   a. At what point in the relationship did you realize it?

2. At what ages were you in the relationship?
   a. Do you think that it impacted your development during this time?

3. Did your relationship with parents or care-takers help you to overcome the situation?
   a. Why or why not?

4. Did relationships with non-parental adults help you to overcome the situation?
   a. Why or why not?

5. Did relationships with peers help you to overcome the situation?
   a. Why or why not?

6. Were there societal factors that helped or hindered your ability to find support during this time?
   a. What were they and what was the impact?

7. Were there aspects of your culture that helped or hindered you ability to find support during this time?
   a. What were they and what was the impact?

8. Where, or with whom, were you able to find the most support during and/or after the relationship?
   a. Were you a member of any groups, clubs, or organizations?
      i. If so, did you find them supportive?
      ii. Why or why not?

9. How did you grow from the experience?
10. What would you want to share with someone who is in an abusive relationship?

11. How has the experience impacted your personal identity and your outlook on life?

12. Did you or your partner seek counseling services during or after the relationship?
   a. Before or after?
   b. Did you go alone or together?
   c. What was the primary concern when seeking counseling?
   d. Were there barriers to or challenges with accessing counseling services?
   e. How did you chose your counselor?
   f. Did you look for a counselor that specialized in LGBT issues? Dating violence?
   g. Did you see a counselor in the community or at your school?
   h. Did you feel understood by your counselor?
   i. Did you feel comfortable being honest with your counselor?
   j. What would you have liked your counselor to do that he or she did not do?
   k. For how long did you receive services?
   l. Were you satisfied with the outcome?
      i. Why or why not?

13. If you think about one person or group that was the most helpful to you during and after your experience, what characteristics come to mind? What actions?

14. Is there anything else that you would like to share?
APPENDIX D
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Participant Demographics

Please state your age:

How do you identify your gender?

How do you identify your sexuality?

How do you identify your race?

How do you identify your ethnicity?

Have you participated in a research study before?

Why are you interested in participating in this study?
APPENDIX E
IRB 02 APPROVAL LETTERS
DATE: February 22, 2013

TO: Rachel Henesy
510 SE 8th Street, Apt. 3
Gainesville, FL 32601

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board 02

SUBJECT: Approval of Protocol #2012-U-1278
Exploring the Strengths, Resiliencies and Challenges of Lesbian and Bisexual Females Who Experienced Dating Violence in a Same-Sex Relationship During Adolescence

SPONSOR: None

I am pleased to advise you that the University of Florida Institutional Review Board has recommended approval of this protocol. Based on its review, the UIRB determined that this research presents no more than minimal risk to participants. Your protocol was approved as an expedited study under category 7: Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Given this status, it is essential that you obtain signed documentation of informed consent from each participant. Enclosed is the dated, IRB-approved informed consent to be used when recruiting participants for the research. If you wish to make any changes to this protocol, including the need to increase the number of participants authorized, you must disclose your plans before you implement them so that the Board can assess their impact on your protocol. In addition, you must report to the Board any unexpected complications that affect your participants.

It is essential that each of your participants sign a copy of your approved informed consent that bears the IRB approval stamp and expiration date.

This approval is valid through February 22, 2014. If you have not completed the study prior to this date, please telephone our office (392-0433) and we will discuss the renewal process with you. Additionally, should you complete the study on or before the expiration date, please submit the study closure report to our office. The form can be located at http://irb.ufl.edu/irb02/Continuing_Review.html. It is important that you keep your Department Chair informed about the status of this research protocol.

ISF:dl

An Equal Opportunity Institution
DATE: July 16, 2013

TO: Rachel Henesy
510 SE 8th Street, Apt. 3
Gainesville, FL 32601

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Revision of Protocol #2012-U-1278
Exploring the Strengths, Resiliencies and Challenges of Lesbian and Bisexual Female who Experienced Dating Violence in a Same-Sex Relationship During Adolescence

SPONSOR: None

The request to revise the above referenced protocol has been reviewed and approved. Approval of this study is valid through February 22, 2014.

The Board must review any further revisions to this protocol, including the need to increase the number of participants authorized prior to implementation.

IF:dl

- Sending email request for participants over various UF listservs to reach more potential participants
- Will post flyers for study in various UF locations
- Will attend meetings for LGBT Affairs and Pride Student Union to explain the protocol and purposes of the study
DATE: December 13, 2013

TO: Rachel Henesy
14509 E. County Road 325
Hawthorne, FL 32640

FROM: Ira S. Fischler, PhD; Chair
University of Florida
Institutional Review Board

SUBJECT: Revision of Protocol #2012-U-1278
Exploring the Strengths, Resiliencies, and Challenges of Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual People Who Experienced Dating Violence

SPONSOR: None

The request to revise the above referenced protocol has been reviewed and approved. Approval of this study is valid through February 22, 2014.

The Board must review any further revisions to this protocol, including the need to increase the number of participants authorized prior to implementation.

IF: cl

- Added males or females ages 18-30
- Revise distribution of flyers
- Added $25 gift card to first four participants
- Revised flyers
- Added counselors
- Revised consent and title
Would you like to share your story of strength and resilience?

Participants 18 and older are needed for a qualitative study on the strengths, resiliencies, and challenges of lesbian, gay, or bisexual people who have overcome adolescent dating violence.

The focus of this study is not on the details of abuse or violence, but on the factors that helped you to overcome the situation. Any obstacles that you faced while trying to access resources will also be explored.

You may have the potential to learn about your strengths and coping skills while reflecting on how you survived and overcame the negative situation you were in. Additionally, the first four participants will receive a $25 Starbucks gift card.

Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, it is possible that memories may cause psychological or emotional distress. Participants may quit the study at any time without repercussions, and you can be referred to the Counseling and Wellness Center (UF students only) or the Alachua County Crisis Center for free counseling services if you would like.

The data collected from this study may help inform counseling professionals about the strengths and resiliencies of this population and could lead to further research on affirmative counseling.

If you would like to participate in this study or learn more, please directly contact Rachel Henesy, M.A.Ed.Ed.S Candidate in Counselor Education, at Rachelp@ufl.edu or 813.716.3917 for more information. Please contact me if you are personally interested in this study, not to recommend others. Thank you.

Confidentiality

Your identity and information will be held confidential to the extent provided by law. Some direct quotes may be used in publication of study; however, they will be anonymous and therefore not connected with your name or identifying information. Limits to confidentiality include abuse of a minor, a person who is disabled, or a person who is elderly (this can include past abuse if it has not yet been reported). Confidentiality can also be broken if you are a danger to yourself or others or if ordered by a court of law. Audio files and transcriptions of interviews will not be associated with your name or any identifying information and will be destroyed after data analysis.
APPENDIX G
RECRUITMENT EMAIL
Hello,

My name is Rachel Henesey and I am an M.A.E./Ed.S candidate in the Mental Health Counseling program at the University of Florida. This is an invitation to participate in a qualitative research study on the strengths and resiliencies of lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual people who have overcome adolescent dating violence. The focus of this study is not on the details of the abuse or violence, but on the factors that helped you to overcome the situation. Any obstacles that you faced while trying to access resources may also be explored. You may have the potential to learn about your strengths and coping skills while reflecting on how you survived and overcame the negative situation you were in. The results may help to inform the field of affirmative counseling.

Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, you might experience psychological or emotional distress. Participants may quit the study at any time without any repercussions, and you can be referred to the Counseling and Wellness Center (UF students only) or the Alachua County Crisis Center for free counseling services if you would like. The data collected from this study may help inform counseling professionals about the strengths and resiliencies of this population and could lead to further research. To thank you for your time, the first four research participants will receive a $25 Starbucks gift card.

If you are between the ages of 18 and 30 and are interested in participating in this study, please contact me (Rachel Henesey) directly at Rachelpri@ufl.edu or 813.716.5917. If you have received this from a Listserv or mailing list, please DO NOT hit “reply.”

Confidentiality

Your identity and information will be held confidential to the extent provided by law. Some direct quotes may be used in publication of study; however, they will be anonymous and therefore not connected with your name or identifying information. Limits to confidentiality include abuse of a minor, a person who is disabled, or a person who is elderly (this can include past abuse if it has not yet been reported). Confidentiality can also be broken if you are a danger to yourself or others or if ordered by a court of law. Audio files and transcriptions of interviews will not be associated with your name or any identifying information and will be destroyed after data analysis.

Thank you for your interest in my study. Please contact me if you have any questions or if you would like to learn more about participation.

Sincerely,

Rachel Henesey
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Rachel Henesy was born in St. Petersburg, Florida. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology in 2009 and began the Master of Arts/Education Specialist program in Mental Health Counseling at the University of Florida in 2011. During her time in the Master of Arts/Education Specialist program, Rachel has volunteered for the Alachua County Crisis Center, interned at Pace Center for Girls, and worked as a Graduate Peer Educator for STRIVE (Sexual Trauma & Interpersonal Violence Education) at GatorWell. She anticipates graduation in May 2014 and is looking forward to beginning a doctoral program in Counselor Education in the fall of 2014.