

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER STUDENTS: NEEDS AND
RETENTION ASSESSMENT

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Abstract
of
LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER STUDENTS: NEEDS AND
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Brief Literature Review

The literature review includes a history of the Gay rights movement including the history of LGBT students in higher education, attitudes towards LGBT individuals in the United States as well as more specifically towards sexual minorities in higher education, and current retention strategies that are being utilized in higher education.

Statement of Problem

There is a deficiency of information about the educational experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender students on campuses of higher education. More specifically, there is little to no research about the academic successes and retention of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender students and whether sexual minority students feel that their educational experiences are being affected by their sexual identity.

Sources of Data

Data was collected via anonymous online surveys from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender students currently pursuing degrees in higher education. Supplementary

data was collected via in person and telephone interviews from Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender individuals who previously received post secondary degrees and now currently work in education.

Conclusions Reached

Results of the study indicate that current Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender students feel that their experiences in higher education are not being affected by their sexual identity. However, there are implications that subtle heteronormativity continues to affect sexual minority students' higher educational experiences. Recommendations are made for future study concerning LGBT student success and retention as well as suggestions for future best practice with sexual minority students in higher education.

_____, Committee Chair
Geni Cowan, PhD

Date

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

What determines the success of a student in higher education? The phenomenon of retention and successful student outcomes have been studied by researchers in higher education for decades - parsing out the minutiae impacting various campus populations, determining what services will better prepare them, attempting to discover the proverbial key to retention. What happens, then, when a specific campus population remains relatively invisible? What happens when educational institutions in and of themselves have foundations in practices that oppress a student population?

The transition into higher education is incredibly jarring for all students; discovering what is required of them both academically, socially, personally, and professionally can prove so taxing that it affects an individual's ability to function within the institution of higher education. The age at which most college students enter into higher education is a period in an individual's life cycle that is commonly associated with great personal identity development, growth and change. For sexual minority students, there is an extra layer of challenge surrounding these typical young adult tasks. Creating a personal identity that is considered by many to be deviant, abnormal, or nonstandard in a frequently inhospitable environment can create immense mental strife for young students of higher education (D'Augelli, 1993). Sexual minority students, then, must balance this personality development along with their academic endeavors.

While student service workers in higher education often find avenues in which to engage with sexual minority students, the general campus population does not have the same regular contact. This can leave Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) students often feeling discriminated against, isolated, underserved or simply unseen (D'Augelli, 1993). Due to the invisibility or outright oppression of sexual minority students, they are at much higher risk of facing psychological health issues as well as personal and academic barriers.

Working in residential education in both a university setting and at a community college, the researcher has both experienced and witnessed the extreme difficulty that many sexual minority students face in higher education as they struggle to match their personal identity development with their academic endeavors. D'Augelli (1993) suggested that LGBT students spend a much more significant amount of time focusing on identity development than their heterosexual peers. The literature suggests as well, that because LGBT students are spending such significant time concentrating on identity development within an oppressive climate, they invest less energy and find less value in their academic activities.

Due to the significant barriers and challenges that LGBT students face in institutions of higher education, one would expect that this population faces higher levels of departure than their heterosexual peers. In a cursory evaluation of the retention literature, the researcher found little research or publication on the topic of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered student success and retention. Literature on issues LGBT students face on university and college campuses has grown dramatically in the past

decade. There are volumes written about mental health issues that sexual minority youth face as well as the attitudes of heterosexual individuals toward LGBT individuals in higher educational institutions. Retention and academic persistence are some of the most widely and deeply studied topics in higher education, yet the academic needs and the retention rates of sexual minorities in higher education seem to be all but absent.

The history of Gay rights in the United States, abroad, and within institutions of higher education is extensive. While great forward movement has occurred in gaining rights and attitudinal change toward sexual minorities, LGBT individuals still face immense obstacles including issues of oppression, institutionalized homophobia, discrimination in employment, heterosexism in their daily life, as well as issues of discrimination and invisibility in institutions of higher education (Waldo, 1998, 1999; Fone, 2000; Ellis & Riggle, 1996; Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999).

There is often an assumption that institutions of higher education are more amenable to the plights of LGBT individuals. Literature about sexual minorities on campuses of higher education has increased greatly in the last several decades (Abes & Jones, 2004; Allen, 1995; Waldo, 1998; Sanlo, Rankin & Schoenberg, 2002; Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Ellis & High, 2004), however, there still appears to be very little data about numbers of sexual minority students (who are hard to track as they are a self-identifying population) and even less data about academic persistence and retention with this population (Waldo, 1998; Sanlo et al., 2002).

While research about sexual minority students is increasing, the needs of these students and the resources to meet these needs still remain only minimally visible on

many campuses and are completely unknown on others. Even if an institution has in place resources meant to assist sexual minority students, the system seems to continue to fail the students in many ways. Campus climates and attitudes toward sexual minority students are often less than welcoming and are at worst outright oppressive. In addition, LGBT students report little to no mention of “alternative” sexualities or points of views of non-heterosexual individuals in their curriculum (D’Augelli, 1993). They also recognized few mentor figures on campus and few if any recognized “safe spaces” where they would not be targeted because of their sexual orientation or identity (D’Augelli, 1993, p. 256).

Any student entering an institution of higher education faces immense transitional and identity development issues, however sexual minority students face unique challenges. College is often identified as a time when youth develop their sexual and personal identities (D’Augelli, 1993). In addition to trying to mitigate their own personal identity development, they face the extra burden of developing an alternative sexual orientation in an environment that at best does not globally recognize their identity and at worst oppresses them for it.

Personal identity development issues, which often lead to mental health problems, along with a less impactful educational curriculum may affect a student’s educational experience and, in turn, affect their academic persistence and possibly their ability to be retained by the institutions within which they are enrolled.

Statement of the Problem

There exists a deficiency of research about the academic persistence, retention, and educational experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered individuals in institutions of higher education. While there is some qualitative information about the experiences of LGBT individuals in higher education, there is little research about their academic success and almost no longitudinal studies concerning sexual minorities' experiences and success rates.

This study seeks to identify the factors that add to the likelihood of LGBT students being academically persistent and retained until degree completion. It will look at the academic and nonacademic factors, and the interplay of the two, that may influence academic persistence and retention. It also seeks to illuminate the experiences of LGBT students on campuses of higher education and help to determine what would create a more impactful educational experience for sexual minority students. Additionally, this study will identify personal experiences of current LGBT students in higher education to provide faculty, staff, and administrators with an understanding of how heterosexism and homophobia affect the academic success of LGBT students. Finally, it will explore what future research and program implementation is needed to increase sexual minority student retention and create a more impactful educational experience for LGBT students. Overall, the study will attempt to answer the two following study questions:

1. How are sexual minority students' retention and academic success rates affected by their sexual identity?

2. What improvements can be made on campuses of higher education to help facilitate more impactful experiences for LGBT students?

Definition of Terms

It is imperative that clarity be established in any research work. Therefore, it is essential that some basic terms be defined from the onset of this research. For the purposes of this research the following definitions will be used. Note that all terms will be used as defined.

Academic Persistence: A student's ability to stay within the higher education system from first entering the institution until degree completion (Seidman, 2005).

Bisexuality: "Erotic attraction to males and females; the coexistence in an individual of homosexuality and heterosexuality" (Barker, 1999, p. 48).

Discrimination: Negative or unequal treatment of an individual due to a specific characteristic trait such as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. (Barker, 1999).

Disenfranchisement: Creating barriers to or removing an individual's ability to exercise a right. This also includes a feeling that an individual or group holds too little significance to create any social change (Barker, 1999).

Gay: A term used to describe individuals with a homosexual orientation (Barker, 1999).

GLB: An acronym utilized to include Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual individuals

Heterosexism: "The belief that Gay men and Lesbians are deviant, abnormal or inferior to heterosexual people" (Barker, 1999, p. 214).

Homophobia: An irrational fear or hatred of homosexual people (Barker, 1999).

Homosexuality: “The sexual or erotic orientation by some men and women for member of their same sex” (Barker, 1999, p. 220).

Impactful: A powerful or dramatic effect.

Institutional Departure: When a student leaves an institution of higher education (Seidman, 2005).

Institutional Homophobia: Historically entrenched homophobia that occurs within and through institutions due to their practices, language, culture etc.

Internalized homophobia: Dislike or disdain for one’s homosexual identity (Barker, 1999).

Involuntary Departure: When an institution does not allow a student to continue with their enrollment (Seidman, 2005).

LGBT: An acronym utilized to include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender individuals.

Lesbian: “A woman whose erotic orientation is for other women” (Barker, 1999, p. 274).

Oppression: When severe restrictions are placed on a group of people, in this case sexual minorities, by a government or institutional organization. These restrictions are either placed formally or subtly through practice causing the individual or group to feel exploited, devalued, or ineffectual (Barker, 1999).

Retention: A student’s continuation in education from admission to a university until degree completion (Seidman, 2005).

Sexual Minority: An individual who considers their sexual orientation to be other than heterosexual (including but not limited to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender).

System Departure: When a student leaves the higher education system as a whole (Seidman, 2005).

Transgender: An individual who identifies with or expresses a gender identity that is different from the gender identity that corresponds to the person's sex at birth.

Voluntary Departure: When a student voluntarily leaves an education institution (Seidman, 2005).

Limitations

This study faces several limitations. First, this study will involve current sexual minority students in higher education and graduates but does not identify LGBT students who attempted to pursue a degree in higher education but were not retained until graduation. It is not inclusive of heterosexual students' perceptions towards LGBT students, campus climate in regards to LGBT students, or LGBT content within the curriculum of higher education. This study includes a self-identification process to create a purposeful sample which limits the diversity within the selected sample. Also, the process of anonymous self identification to a group carries inherent risk – as individuals could falsely identify themselves as a member of the specified group. Respondents varied greatly in age as well as in number of years of experience within a community of higher education. They also varied in whether or not they were in current pursuit of a degree or

post-award. Respondents were sampled from all types of degree programs, including undergraduate and graduate courses of study.

Finally, this study primarily sampled current students located at a metropolitan, public campus in California within the United States during the academic period between the Fall of 2009 to Spring, 2010. However, post graduate respondents varied widely in terms of years of graduation as well as types of degrees received and institutions attended. The use of purposeful and convenience sampling does not allow for conclusions to be drawn about the experiences of sexual minority students at other institutions of higher education and does not account for regional differences or variations in campus culture.

Significance of the Study

Retention is one of the most widely studied phenomena in higher education. The ability to persist to graduation is a topic that affects all students and can be both positively and negatively affected by an individual's personal and academic identifications. There has been a great deal of research done about marginalized students to find out if their experiences in higher education are significantly different from the experiences of their majority peers (Sanlo et al., 2002). Various studies have suggested that "some minority students might be less satisfied than their peers with their college experience; potentially higher levels of dissatisfaction may contribute to lower rates of retention and persistence, than those found among non-minority students (Sanlo et al.,

2002). Unfortunately, LGBT students have typically been neglected as a marginalized population on campuses of higher education.

There is a clear deficiency in research, data, and literature concerning the experiences of LGBT students in higher education and their subsequent retention rates (Waldo, 1998; Sanlo, 2004). While there is “still no concrete evidence of the number of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender people in the U.S.” (Sanlo et al., p. 33) or the number of LGBT individuals in higher education, sexual minorities are clearly a portion of both the greater population and the student population at institutions of higher education. The gap in the literature concerning this population appears to be a mirror of the lack of services for, and attention being paid to, sexual minority students in institutions of higher education. It is apparent that this population continues to face prejudice, discrimination, and continued oppression on a more global level as well as in institutions of higher education. Because there are typically heterosexist values underlying higher education the work to address this population remains ignored (Sanlo et al., 2002, p. xvii).

The purpose of this study was to investigate a variety of issues facing LGBT students in institutions of higher education and to establish how these obstacles are impacting these students’ educational experiences and ability to be retained. This research will also attempt to illuminate some strategies that may create a more impactful experience for current sexual minority students in higher education which will improve their personal, academic, and professional development. Data from this research may be used in the future to improve best practice for retention of sexual minority students in

higher education and will illuminate possible future avenues of research concerning this population.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of this study covers several topics including a review of the related literature, a discussion of the methodologies utilized to carry out the study, a presentation of the study results including an analysis of the data, and finally the conclusions and implications that can be drawn from this study as well as recommendations for future best practice for services to LGBT students.

The Review of Related Literature (Chapter 2) includes a history of the Gay rights movement including the history of LGBT students in higher education, attitudes towards LGBT individuals in the United States and then more specifically towards sexual minorities in higher education, and current retention strategies that are being utilized in higher education. The Methodology (Chapter 3), contains information about the setting, population, and sample of the study as well as the specific design of the study. Following that, an analysis of the data and findings is presented in Chapter 4. Finally, a summary of the research is presented in Chapter 5, along with recommendations for future study and suggestions for future best practice with sexual minority students in higher education.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

There has been substantial research on attitudes towards Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) students on campuses of higher education. The campus climate and general feelings about LGBT students have begun to be documented with more regularity. Sexual minority students face specific challenges of identity development that the researcher believes impacts their educational experiences and possibilities of academic success. While much of the research thus far has focused on attitudes and experiences of heterosexual individuals toward sexual minority college students, very little focuses on LGBT students' personal and academic experiences in higher education (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Herek, 1984; Kurdek, 1988; Clift, 1988; Brown et al., 2004). There is even less data and review of LGBT students' resiliency and academic persistence. This literature review elaborates on a number of these issues. First, the history of the Gay rights movement as well as the history of LGBT students in higher education is explored. Secondly, attitudes towards LGBT individuals in the United States are addressed. Then more specifically attitudes towards sexual minorities and homosexuality in higher education are investigated along with the effects of homophobia on sexual minority students. Finally, current retention strategies being utilized in the field of higher education are examined as well as the lack of information about academic persistence among sexual minority populations at institutions of higher education.

The Gay Rights Movement

Issues of discrimination against homosexuals were brought forward in society over one hundred years ago by Magnus Hirschfeld (Fone, 2000). Hirschfeld, considered the father of the Gay rights movement abroad, established The Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1897, whose main purpose was advocating for the rights of LGBT individuals. The organization successfully supported and campaigned for the rights of LGBT persons for over three decades until it was forced to end its advocacy activities as a result of Nazi Germany's policies against homosexuals and those who supported them. Harry Hay is recognized as the father of the contemporary Gay rights movement in the United States (Abcarian, 1990; Fone, 2000). At the beginning of the 1950s, Hay and his fellow advocates began a discussion about homosexuality and the need for a community that LGBT individuals could claim as their own. Hay and friends subsequently founded the Mattachine Society in 1951. The Mattachine's mission statement illustrated the need for community as well as the desire to educate the greater society about the needs of homosexuals. The mission statement elaborated this need:

“To Unify” homosexuals “isolated from their own kind and unable to adjust to the dominant culture...”; “To Educate” and improve the “woefully meager and inconclusive” information about homosexuality...; and “To Lead”...the whole mass of social deviates” to achieve the missions of unification and education. (Timmons, 1990, p. 154)

While Hay and his friends worked tirelessly to create the group, and consequently, a sense of community, the threat of legal persecution was high and the

society's meetings were forced to be held in secret. Persecution of LGBT individuals was not uncommon during the 1950s and into the 1960s. Homosexuals were targeted by law enforcement officials for a litany of acts that were considered illegal during this time period. An article published in the LA Times, *The Consenting Adult Homosexual and the Law: An Empirical Study of Enforcement and Administration in Los Angeles County* (1966), provided comprehensive descriptions of illegal practices that an individual could be cited and/or arrested for at that time. Timmons (1990) suggested that laws, as well as social customs, were highly anti-homosexual during this time – most states held any sexual act except the missionary position between a heterosexual couple as a crime punishable with a prison sentence of up to twenty years.

Despite the continual fear of persecution, Hay and his society members refused to assimilate into dominate culture. The Mattachine society members, including Hay, carried the modern Gay rights movement forward, allowing it to gain momentum through future decades. The Mattachine Society, however, supported one of the first victories of the Gay rights movement. When a member of the society was involved in a legal suit over entrapment, the Mattachine Society stood behind the individual, Gale Jennings, and raised funds to support him as he challenged his arrests in court. Although the jury eventually deadlocked and in the end the case was dropped, this event was recorded as a victory for Jennings as well as the Gay rights movement as a whole (Abcarian, 1990; Fone, 2000). This legal case, which intended to persecute an individual for sexual orientation, although not won, provided a stepping stone for future legal battles involving homosexual individuals and a stepping stone for future advances in Gay rights in general.

Friends Frank Kameny and Jack Nichols also founded the Washington, DC Chapter of the Mattachine Society (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998; Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999). Kameny, Nichols and fellow society members in DC vehemently and publicly opposed the American Psychological Association's (APA) stance on homosexuality (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998; Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999). The two spearheaded a campaign against the medical model that labeled homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998; Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999). The group of activists' main goal was to enlighten the APA about the non-pathological nature of homosexuality. It would take almost a decade, and the efforts of both members of the Mattachine Society, and members of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), as well as a sympathetic psychiatrist by the name of Kent Robinson, for homosexuality to be officially removed as a diagnostic category in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1973 (McGarry & Wasserman, 1998; Clendinen & Nagourney, 1999).

Meanwhile, a younger, more radical, group of Gay rights advocates was forming. The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed in July of 1969 – a group of passionate, more aggressive individuals facing a conservative nation (McGarry & Wasserman 1998). The GLF was established during a time when civil rights injustices were being fought on several fronts in the United States. The GLF modeled its activities after many of these other civil rights movements. The GLF operated similarly to movements such as the New Left, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the counterculture, the Black Panthers, and other liberation movements. They utilized their energy and followings aggressively, organizing

rallies, protests and engaging in fights in the political arenas as well – including the American Psychological Association’s annual conventions from 1970-1973 (McGarry & Wasserman 1998).

As various Mattachine Societies were forming around the country, similar movements were taking place on campuses of higher education throughout the United States. The first Gay rights organization on a campus of higher education was the brain child of Stephen Donaldson (ne Robert Martin) (Beemyn, 2003). Donaldson, an openly Bisexual student previously involved in the New York chapter of the Mattachine Society, found after his first year at Columbia that he had not met any other Gay students and was later forced to move out of the residence halls when one of his suitemates lodged a complaint about having to live with an individual who identified as Bisexual (Beemyn, 2003). Following this experience, and after having finally met other Gay students on campus, Donaldson suggested beginning a “Mattachine-like organization” on the Columbia campus (Beemyn, 2003, p. 207). Donaldson and friends faced tremendous challenges in establishing the Student Homophile League (SHL), an organization whose roots were in creating a community for LGBT students on Columbia’s campus (Beemyn, 2003). Students, fearing for their safety both on and off campus, wanted to remain anonymous within the organization, yet administration at that time at Columbia would not grant recognition to any student group without a membership list. Eventually, Donaldson was able to recruit student campus leaders to become “proforma” members of the organization – submitting prominent student leaders’ names on the roster, allowing other student members to remain anonymous within the group (Beemyn, 2003, p. 207).

Successfully satisfying the administration, while still maintaining the safety and anonymity of the group members, “Columbia officially chartered the country’s first student Gay rights group on April 19, 1967” (Beemyn, 2003, p. 207).

Unfortunately, receiving University recognition did not create a smooth transition for the first student-run Gay rights group. Following their official charter, the *New York Times* ran an article detailing the groups inception which caused a “national controversy and nearly cost the students involved in the SHL their careers at Columbia” (Beemyn, 2003, p. 207). The University received intense scrutiny leading campus administration to question the merit of the existence of the SHL, including the dean of the college who called the SHL “quite unnecessary” and the director of counseling services who suggested that the SHL would “promote deviant behavior amongst the students” (Beemyn, 2003, p. 207). The media attraction, however, had one positive effect for the SHL; it led to great student interest in the group and assisted immensely with student recruitment. The media coverage also led students at other institutions to contact Donaldson about starting their own chapters of SHL at their respective campuses. Cornell was the next major institution to begin the process of creating a student homophile league chapter. While the students at Cornell faced similar challenges to those the student organizers faced at Columbia, the Cornell SHL chapter was eventually realized on May 14, 1968 (Beemyn, 2003).

The Cornell SHL chapter faced a variety of challenges but also served as an active ally for LGBT students not only within the confines of the academic institution but also within the greater community. The students in the Cornell SHL attempted to create

publicly Gay spaces by mobilizing LGBT students as well as sponsoring campus events and movements. In an attempt to become a more legitimately recognized group and to create greater social change the students of the Cornell, SHL eventually aligned themselves with another liberal student group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) (Beemyn, 2003). SDS was one of the largest and most well-recognized student organizations on the Cornell campus at the time. By aligning themselves with the SDS the members of the Cornell, SHL gained access “to a local leftist printing company for its newsletter and flyers,” as well as procuring greater student support (Beemyn, 2003, p 218).

Through various activities and events, including inviting a banned radical leader to the league’s first meeting of the year and staging a public protest campaign, the Cornell SHL eventually became more radical and changed its name to the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) (Beemyn, 2003). While the GLF still served the needs and rights of LGBT students on campus, the group took on a much greater militant presence in hopes of attracting more students and greater social mobilization. Participating in a few influential activities greatly increased the groups’ visibility and made an impact on the national arena of the Gay rights movement. The first visible protest activity was inviting a banned radical leader to a campus event as a guest speaker. The second, and most widely recognized occurrence, was a public protest demonstration at a local bar that had been previously known as a popular “Gay hangout” which had began discriminating against homosexual patrons. Beemyn (2008) illustrated the profundity of this single act, stating “as perhaps the first Gay student sit-in, the demonstration at Morrie’s [Bar] received

widespread attention in the nation's Gay news media and was cited as one of the important early Gay liberation events" (p. 221).

Needless to say, the GLF had a great effect not only on the Gay rights movement at institutions of higher education but also on the nation's Gay rights movement as a whole. The nationally-recognized Gay student sit-in greatly strengthened the GLF's power on campuses. The GLF also created an arena where sexual identity could be aligned with other political movements, convincing non-Gay activists to support Gay rights which helped to develop a "progressive coalition" which continues today (Beemyn, 2003).

Arguably most importantly, however, the development of Student Homophile Leagues and the Gay Liberation Front, created a space for LGBT individuals to be more open within and outside of the context of higher education to be more open. In the beginning of the movement in the 1950s and 1960s, most LGBT groups were extremely discreet due to the members' fears of being revealed as Gay and persecuted socially and legally. The dropping of pseudonyms in progressing student groups, openly held meetings and dances, and publicly speaking out about their pride in being Gay created an arena for many more Gay individuals to become more self accepting and come out throughout the nation. It also allowed LGBT individuals to discuss their lives in front of various populations which greatly helped counter deeply entrenched stereotypes and create an even greater sense of security for LGBT students and outside community members to accept themselves and find pride in their identities (Beemyn, 2003).

Contemporary Gay rights advocates continue to try to gain equality for LGBT individuals in the United States in all social and political arenas as well as for LGBT students at all levels of education. While it appears that there have been improvements in some arenas for LGBT individuals, research shows that there continue to be new legal and social issues concerning Gay rights in the United States (Cuomo, 2007). “Although there are approximately 30 or so state laws and around 300 municipal and county ordinances that ban discrimination based on sexual orientation in the United States, there are still many legal and social barriers facing sexual minorities in the United States” (Cuomo, 2007, p. 76).

While Gay rights advocates continue to work toward gaining equal rights in many professional and institutional environments much of the recent focus of the movement has been in personal arenas. The struggle concerning Gay marriage has been a hot topic in the Gay rights movement in the past decade (Green, 2006). Marriage continues to be regarded as a paramount achievement in American culture, yet same sex couples are still unable to enter into legally binding, formally recognized relationships with their partners in many states and same sex partnerships remain unrecognized by any federal institution (Green, 2006; Kurdek, 2004). In addition to providing homosexual couples with the social recognition of their relationships that they crave, sexual minority couples are arguing that they are entitled to the privileges associated with having a legally recognized relationship, including but not limited to Social Security spousal benefits, hospital visitation rights and the ability to make medical decisions concerning their partners, and access to veteran’s life insurance and health programs (Kurdek, 2004, p. 880).

Along with the fight to create equal legal and institutional opportunities for sexual minority individuals, Gay rights advocates still endeavor to fight homophobia and violence in everyday society including in schools. Gay students are still the subject of violent verbal and physical attacks (Smith, 1998). Unfortunately, many educational institutions and instructors continue to ignore ostracized Gay students and the verbal and physical abuse of sexual minorities (Smith, 1998). Violence against LGBT individuals due to their sexual identity continues to be pervasive in the United States (Swigonski et al., 2001). Hate crimes, by their very nature, are based primarily on the victim's membership to a specific group, which is often negatively stereotyped; in this case the group is a perceived sexual identity (Craig & Waldo, 1996). In 2001, only twenty-one states had laws covering crimes based on sexual orientation yet hate crimes based on sexual orientation are the third highest category reported annually to the FBI (Swigonski et al., 2001). Crimes committed against sexual minorities because of perceived sexual identity are characterized as the "most violent bias crimes" (Swigonski et al., 2001, p. 2). One of the most brutal anti-LGBT crimes in the past several years was the case of Matthew Shepard. In 1998, a young man named Matthew Shepard, who identified as homosexual, left a bar in Laramie, Wyoming with two other young men (Swigonski et al., 2001). Shepard was kidnapped, brutally beaten, and left tied to a fence in a remote rural area. He was found more than twelve hours later and admitted to the hospital where he was later pronounced dead due to his extensive injuries (Swigonski et al., 2001). Despite the greater sense of freedom and comfort that sexual minorities may enjoy today

(Cuomo, 2007), violence and homophobia continue to be grave issues for many LGBT individuals, including youth and students in their academic environments.

Attitudes toward LGBT Individuals in the United States

Oppression of LGBT individuals has a long history and prevalence in North America. The oppression of LGBT individuals in the colonial period in North America is well documented – choking, drowning, burning and execution were only a few of the ways in which colonial societies dealt with homosexual individuals (Katz, 1976). With the progression of the Gay rights movement, the LGBT population in the United States today enjoys many rights that were previously unheard of. While great strides have been made to restore rights to this disenfranchised population, there are still immense barriers that hinder civil rights of LGBT individuals.

Institutionalized homophobia is one of the largest barriers still facing LGBT individuals in today's society. As a historically Judeo-Christian nation, many obstacles stem from entrenched religiosity in government and educational institutions in the United States. Religious institutions alone however play a critical role in the forward movement of LGBT individuals gaining civil rights. In her book, *Virtual Equality*, Urvashi Vaid (1995) illuminated the effect of the conservative Christian anti-Gay movement stating, "The CR [Christian Right] mobilized grassroots opposition to homosexuality, and Gay rights were dealt setbacks locally and nationally. Local Gay rights ordinances were repealed, and in some cases banned permanently" (Vaid, 1995, p. 5). Vaid clearly

illustrated how the Christian Right has created anti-Gay themes that are central to their political and social activity.

Heteronormativity and homophobia are also entrenched in employment practices in the contemporary United States. Discrimination of LGBT employees has been an issue in the United States for years. The United States government removed many LGBT individuals and innumerable suspected homosexuals from government positions assuming they were involved in communist activity (Fone, 2000). It was not until 1970 that a group of Gay activists in New York City drafted the first bill challenging discrimination against LGBT employees (Fone, 2000). Unfortunately, LGBT individuals are still affected in today's places of business. LGBT employees can become the targets of colleagues as well as homophobic and/or heteronormative working conditions. Badgett (1996) explained "Gay and Bisexual people have no explicit protection from employment discrimination at the federal level in the private sector" (p. 32), placing LGBT employees in inherently vulnerable positions at their places of work should they chose to disclose their sexual orientation. This lack of protection also creates an intrinsically heteronormative environment where sexual minorities do not feel safe at their places of employment. Employers, with a lack of federal legal implications or a collective bargaining agreement, are essentially able to hire or fire employees on a whim (Badgett, 1996). While the practice has come under attack recently in various court settings the results have been mixed, leaving LGBT employees continually at risk (Badgett, 1996).

Homosexual individuals in the workplace are often negatively affected psychologically by heterosexism and should an LGBT individual disclose his/her sexual

orientation at the workplace s/he is more likely to be targeted by homophobic attitudes and heterosexist actions (Waldo, 1999). Even more damaging is the fact that LGBT individuals who are victims of workplace discrimination have very few legal options with which to defend themselves. Badgett (1996) also found there to be a connection between individuals who chose to disclose their sexual orientation and issues such as monetary rewards, advancement, and discomfort within the workplace social climate; so not only do LGBT individuals face discrimination and homophobia from their colleagues it also affects their ability to be equally compensated in their professional positions.

Attitudes toward Sexual Minorities and Homosexuality in Higher Education

In addition to work place discomfort and often outright discrimination, LGBT persons face heterosexist/homophobic attitudes and issues of oppression in their daily lives. Homophobia and heterosexist attitudes create a social climate that is often detrimental to sexual minorities. Many LGBT individuals' psychological health suffers due to the significant amount of stress they feel because of heterosexist/homophobic attitudes and environmental climates. Living with great stress often causes LGBT individuals to experience "greater vulnerability to depressive distress and anxiety" (Mays & Cochran, 2001, p. 1870).

Adolescents and young adults are possibly the most vulnerable to homophobia and heterosexism and are generally regarded at high risk for psychological health problems (Garofalo & Wolf, 1998; Hershberger & Pilkington, 1997; Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001). Many LGBT individuals find themselves surrounded by and exposed to

homophobic/heterosexist remarks and/or derogatory statements and actions throughout the course of their education. Sadly, many of these remarks and discriminatory acts are ignored by educational administrators and educators. Without direct counter to these oppressive acts and damaging remarks, LGBT individuals find themselves isolated and feeling at risk with no safe space or support system to turn to should they become the target of anti-Gay activity (Morrison & L'Heureux, 2001).

Regrettably, as youth advance in age and move into institutions of higher education, circumstances often do not improve. Clift (1988) stated, “the educational establishment, in general, has conspicuously ignored the position of Lesbian and Gay people in education” (p. 32). Many institutions of higher education not only ignore sexual minorities, they also do not provide the safe environment that young LGBT individuals are searching for and sadly many institutions perpetuate the oppression and disenfranchisement of sexual minority populations. Sexual minority students are still found to “suffer the consequences of intolerance” (Sanlo, 2004, p. 97) and Rankin (2003) found that out of over 1000 LGBT college students interviewed, one-third had experienced some form of harassment on campus. Brown et al. (2004) found that different populations at institutions of higher education reported differing perceptions of the campus climate toward LGBT individuals and that “personal characteristics (such as sex, academic class for students, and academic discipline for faculty members) were related to the respondents’ perceptions of the campus climate and their attitudes, experiences, and behaviors [towards LGBT individuals]” (p. 20). LGBT students perceived the campus climate more negatively than other students, faculty and student

affairs members and also reported being more interested and participatory in LGBT events and topics than their heterosexual peers, faculty and administrators (Brown et al., 2004). Previous research has found lower educational levels to also be correlated with increased negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Herek, 1984; Kurdek, 1988). While young LGBT individuals may assume institutions of higher education to provide a safer environment due to the presence of more highly educated individuals, Kurdek (1988) found that even within a sample of college students those with “poor academic performance tend to endorse negative attitudes toward homosexuals” (p. 736). Higher levels of negative attitudes toward homosexuals also tend to be found in males, younger students, and those with less personal experiences with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender individuals (Clift, 1988; Kurdek, 1988; Brown et al., 2004).

Sexual minority students will not necessarily find a support system from faculty, staff or an institution of higher education as a whole either. Sanlo (2004) noted that “fewer than 10% of the nation’s 3500 colleges and universities have *sexual orientation* in their nondiscrimination policies, and only about 40 institutions have professionally staffed centers that provide services to, for, and about sexual minority students, faculty and staff” (p. 98). In Eliason’s (1996) survey of 1,287 permanent university employees at one institution, 25 percent of the sample held homophobic attitudes. Faculty and staff are also often unwilling or seemingly unable to include sexual minority points of view and/or inclusive language within their teaching, however some disciplines appear to be more sensitive to sexual minority students than others. Brown et al. (2004) also found that sexual minority students could find a greater support base amongst student affairs staff

members rather than faculty and that amongst faculty, those in the “soft sciences” appeared to be more willing to serve as allies to LGBT students and staff. Brown et al. (2004) discovered that faculty members in the “soft sciences” “reported more positive Attitudes toward GLBT [Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender] issues than those in hard sciences and also reported greater interest in GLBT workshops and relevance of GLBT topics than did faculty in the hard sciences” (p. 19).

In addition to finding campus climates, peers, faculty and administrative staff less than supportive, LGBT students also often find their higher educational experience to be less fulfilling than their heterosexual peers. Besides being distracted from their academic endeavors due to worry about unsupportive environments and harassment (Sanlo, 2004), sexual minority students suffer from a lack of representation amongst faculty and staff as well as within the curriculum they engage with. In her 1995 article, *Opening the Classroom Closet: Sexual Orientation and Self-Disclosure*, Katherine Allen, an associate professor noted the great enrichment that both sexual minorities and heterosexual individuals garner when individuals in positions of power in academics disclose their sexual orientations. She also suggested that incorporating a more holistic view of sexual minorities within academic topics will create a more well-rounded educational experience for all students (Allen, 1995). LGBT individuals often find that sexual minority issues, histories, and points of view are barely mentioned or are missing entirely from the curriculums they engage with. A study of the discussions of homosexuality in secondary education in Britain found that “the discussion of homosexuality (in terms of ‘mentions’) had significantly increased since 1984 and the number who regarded this as helpful had

also significantly increased” (Ellis & High, 2004, p. 223). Despite this increase, many of the young people in the study noted that the way in which homosexuality was addressed was still generally unhelpful (Ellis & High, 2004). Researchers understand the need to incorporate homosexual points of views, histories and issues into the curriculum in an attempt to create contexts where students can establish more meaningful identities and educational experiences. Abes and Jones (2004) suggested, “in the classroom, course material should be included that presets diversity within and among sexual orientations, and teaching strategies ought to allow students to reflect on their own life experiences and identities in relationship to the course content” (p. 628). Unfortunately, despite the research suggesting that incorporating issues of homosexuality into educational curriculum will create a more hospitable environment for sexual minority students, little has been done to put these theories into practice. LGBT students continue to find themselves, the history of the sexual minority population, and LGBT points of views missing from their higher educational experience.

Effects of Homophobia on Sexual Minority Students

There is a clear relationship between students’ ability to feel connected to their educational experience and their ability to succeed academically (Tinto, 1975, 1982, 1988). The literature also suggested that there is a connection between students’ relationships with their teachers and their academic success (Cornelius-White, 2007; McCombs, 2004). It could be argued that sexual minority students have a greater need to feel engaged with and recognized by academic faculty as there are few places on

university campuses where they feel connected and safe. Studies have shown that personal development and feelings of safety and involvement in an academic setting are imperative to a student's ability to succeed (Maslow, 1943; Cornelius-White, 2007). If a sexual minority student is fearful of self-disclosing in an academic environment or to a faculty or staff member because of possible adverse consequences then there is little chance of that individual feeling connected to or engaged in their academic experiences or specifically with their instructors.

In addition to feeling connected to their academic experience as a whole students need to have productive, nurturing, or at the very least respectful, relationships with their instructors and other academic staff (Cornelius-White, 2007; McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Whisler, 2007). McCombs (2004) illustrated the need for not only a comfortable academic environment but also for supportive relationships with instructors stating, "Learning is enhanced in contexts where learners have supportive relationships, have a sense of ownership and control over the learning process, and can learn with and from each other in safe and trusting learning environments" (p. 7). In an environment where a student feels that they have less than optimal relationships with their instructors or feel that they are not in a safe learning environment, what are their chances of academic success? Cornelius-White (2007) echoed this need for positive relationships with instructors stating "Secure and reciprocal attachments are important for students to engage in their relationships with teachers, peers, and subject matter and develop healthy self concepts and senses of well-being" (p. 115). Sexual minority students who may feel uncomfortable in the campus climate need to find some way to engage in their academic

experience, one way may be through relationships with their instructors. While LGBT students may be able to succeed academically without this feeling of engagement or connection, most likely not at the level they could if they were able to achieve feelings of integration and attachment with their instructors, their campus community, and their academic experiences as a whole.

Current Retention Strategies in Higher Education

With a multitude of barriers affecting their educational and personal identity development experiences, LGBT students at institutions of higher education are at a much higher risk for psychological health issues. Sexual minority students, facing often heterosexist/homophobic campus climates, institutionalized homophobia, less impactful educational experiences, and a lack of support from fellow students, faculty and staff, face great obstacles in academic persistence and success. Yet, retention and academic persistence are some of the most highly researched topics in higher education. Various minority populations have been identified and studied at the level of higher education including racial/ethnic minorities, students facing socioeconomic challenges, populations of non-typical age groups, gender minorities and so on (Tinto, 2006). However, after an exhaustive review, literature pertaining to the retention of LGBT students specifically is scarce, if at all existent. Concrete quantitative data about the retention levels of sexual minority students is even more difficult to come by (Waldo, 1998).

Literature abounds on the topic of retention of various other student populations. Tinto's (1975, 1982, 1988) continuous famous work on student retention has been

applied to multitudes of student populations, including various student minority populations. Tinto's (1975) theory of social integration, essentially suggesting that students who are more involved and engaged in all aspects of their educational experience are more likely to be retained, seems to apply to all students regardless of minority status. The literature suggests that students who become engaged in their educational experience, both academically and socially, early in their academic careers persist to graduation at higher rates (Tinto, 1975). It seems that the best place in which to begin the process of student integration is early in a student's academic career. Warren (1997) suggested that the best place for engagement and integration to begin are at student orientation sessions. The research thus far suggests that the more quickly and more thoroughly an individual is engaged with the educational institution that they are attending the higher their chances of being retained to graduation.

Students entering higher education face extensive personal and academic transition issues. The more quickly and extensively an individual student is able to connect with the campus within various spheres, academically and socially etc., the higher the chance that that student will persist until graduation. Students in higher education who are able to connect not only with their peers, but also with the material they engage with, and also with the faculty and staff that they interact with on a regular basis are more likely to feel that they belong to the educational community. A failure to connect to others "may lead to the absence of integration and its associated sense of isolation. These in turn may lead to departure from the institution [of higher education]" (Tinto, 1988). An inability to create a sense of community has been found to lead directly

to an inability of students to persist to graduation. A sense of belonging and safety are amongst the basic needs that individuals require in order to move toward any kind of personal, academic, or professional success (Maslow, 1943). All students must move through their own personal identity development, separation, and integration states in order to feel included and engaged; unfortunately sexual minority students face greater challenges in these areas than their heterosexual peers.

While experts in higher education now recognize the great need to integrate and engage with students early on in their educational careers and especially via the classroom, putting the theory of social and academic integration into practice has proven a greater challenge (Braxton, Milem & Sullivan, 2000; Tinto, 2006). While many institutions of higher education have made it a priority to try to increase retention numbers for various populations “substantial gains in student retention have been hard to come by” (Tinto, 2006, p. 2). Academic persistence amongst all student populations has been slow to increase, despite a multitude of research about the topic area. Tinto (2006) states in his contemporary work that the idea of social and academic integration still stands yet putting the theory into practice has proven challenging for institutions of higher education on a whole. Tinto (2006) stressed the importance of involving individuals early in their academic career, stating “involvement, or what is increasingly being referred to as engagement, matters and it matters most during the critical first year of college” (p. 4). What appears to be paramount to student success is the student’s ability to engage with the institution of higher education that they are a part of early on in their academic career.

Unfortunately, sexual minority students often have a difficult time finding their niche within the higher educational setting; they often lack a visible community of peers, supportive faculty and staff, and an accepting educational and community climate. For sexual minorities, the task of integrating within the higher educational context provides even larger challenges than their heterosexual peers face. Waldo (1998) found that “LGB [Lesbian, Bisexual and Gay] students indicated that they feel less accepted and respected on campus than their heterosexual counterparts” (p. 767) and suggested therefore “that encountering hostility on campus may lead to decrements in academic satisfaction” (p. 767). One would assume, therefore, that LGBT students in higher education would face lower rates of academic persistence. There is great difficulty in obtaining data about sexual minority populations and retention due to a myriad of factors including, but not limited to, the fact that the population is self identified and therefore incredibly difficult to track. The lack of visibility of the sexual minority population at many institutions of higher education in combination with the outright prejudice that sexual minorities face within the larger community has left many LGBT students anonymous and lacking in proper academic and personal services. Sadly, this leaves many sexual minorities with a less than fulfilling educational experience, and potentially a failure to be academically retained.

Rationale for the Study

Following a review of the literature concerning sexual minority students’ experiences, successes, and retention in higher education the researcher recognized that

there is a deficiency of research about the LGBT student population on campuses of higher education. As LGBT students are a rich portion of the student population on university campuses it is imperative that academic leaders endeavor to create environments where LGBT students, and all minority populations, feel comfortable and are able to succeed both personally and academically.

It is the researcher's belief that it is the mission and obligation of higher educational leaders to advocate for traditionally oppressed populations who have historically lacked opportunity and support in higher education. As institutions of higher education are further embedded in society there are a myriad of communities and populations making demands on the higher educational system (Brennan, 2008). As institutions guided by public funding and stakeholders, university systems must endeavor to create systems that are publically responsible to society and its' diverse populations (Brennan, 2008). The researcher also believes that it is the obligation of all higher educational leaders to educate all current students to function, and excel, in the contemporary global community. In order to do this it is imperative that students are educated in a rich environment that mirrors the current society in which they will work and live, which includes diverse individuals from different ethnic and racial groups, of different abilities, who participate in a variety of religious practices, and individuals who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender.

Summary

The oppression and disenfranchisement of sexual minorities has a long record within the United States history as well as within environments of higher education. While there have been great advances in gaining basic human rights for LGBT individuals in the past decades, there are still many arenas in which sexual minorities continue to face homophobia and heteronormativity, including institutions of higher education. LGBT students face extreme transitional issues upon entering institutions of higher education that are often left unaddressed creating a heightened risk not only for serious mental and physical ailments but also for less successful academic experiences when compared with their heterosexual peers. While institutions of higher education are often lauded as progressive and inclusive environments filled with forward thinking individuals, research has shown that they do not live up to this ideal. Sexual minority students continue to face at worst, outright homophobia on campuses across the United States and at best a climate that is tolerant but not celebratory of their identity. LGBT students therefore face extensive obstacles, not only in personal identity development but also in academic persistence.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the methodology used in this study. It will illustrate the research design, the population identified, the sample selected, as well as the instrumentation that was used for data collection.

Setting of the Study

Current LGBT students were selected from a metropolitan, public higher education institution in California during the Fall of 2009 to Spring 2010 academic year. Past graduate students were interviewed via telephone or in person in a time and location that was most convenient for the participant. Research consisted of anonymous, online, electronic questionnaires. Subjects were asked to self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, or Other (to be specified by the respondent).

Population and Sample

Population, as defined by Cowan (2007), is “a group of elements (in this case, people) that are all alike on at least one characteristic, but usually more than one” (p. 113). The population for this research included all Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender students who are currently attempting to achieve post secondary degrees or who have previously completed post-secondary study. Clearly, it is impossible to identify

a concrete quantity of those students, due, in part, to the self-identification and social nature of potential oppression in response to self-identification. The sample chosen for this study of current sexual minority students included LGBT students presently attending a metropolitan, public higher education institution in California. For the purposes of this study, the institution will be referred to only as Cal State. The sample included both undergraduate and graduate students working towards degree completion. As this population is so large, the sample was limited specifically to the Cal State campus and to those individuals who self-identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, questioning, or other. It was also limited to sexual minorities who were currently working towards degree completion of some kind at Cal State. Due to these limiting characteristics and the voluntary nature of the questionnaire, the resulting sample size was small ($N = 32$).

Students were first selected utilizing the campus LGBT student center. A link to the electronic survey was provided to students on the LGBT student center's website. Students were also recruited from the center's lists of members. Participants who volunteered to take the survey were asked to self identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Other, or Heterosexual. Those who identified as Heterosexual were not permitted to continue with the survey.

The sample also included LGBT individuals who were previously students in higher education and achieved post secondary degrees. Previous Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender graduates were sampled from a wide variety of institutions as well as types of degree achieved. These individuals were aware of their sexual orientation during

their tenure as students of higher education or now currently identify themselves as a sexual minority. Online questionnaires were distributed to these post graduate individuals. Past graduates elaborated on their experiences utilizing in person or through telephone interviews. All personal information about interviewees was kept confidential.

Due to the nature of this research, purposeful sampling was most appropriate. Because the research required a sample of “information-rich” individuals, simple random sampling was not useful. Schuh, Upcraft and Associates (2001) suggested that purposive sampling “is used because the goal is to solicit the perceptions of specific groups of people who are well informed about the situation” (p. 43). Informants in this study were chosen for their rich knowledge about the specific sexual minority student population and the environment in which the study was being conducted (Cowan, 2007; Schuh et al., 2001).

Design of the Study

Due to the highly personal nature of this study and the importance of gathering personal, specific information, the primary study instrument was an anonymous online survey. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: (1) Background information and (2) open-ended questions that allowed subjects to respond with their personal perceptions and rich experiences. The instrument was also distributed to past graduates – section two allowed these individuals to elaborate further on their experiences as sexual minority students in higher education and allowed for follow-up to both open-ended and closed questions soliciting additional comments and information.

Online anonymous surveys that included both closed and open-ended questions were proposed to individuals who self-identified as a sexual minority and as current student at Cal State. The questionnaire was also presented to individuals who self identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender and previously attained post secondary degrees. The use of purposive sampling (Cowan, 2007) allowed for detailed descriptions of:

- the LGBT students' experiences as sexual minorities;
- their educational experiences; and
- their perceptions of their sexual minority status and how it affected their academic success.

Data Collection

This research was conducted using anonymous, online questionnaires that included both closed and open ended questions – basic demographic questions followed by more in-depth probing questions that allowed individuals to provide their personal experiences, attitudes, and thoughts (Schuh et al., 2001). This type of questioning allowed for the privacy of the subjects who self identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or other so as to allow for more personal disclosure.

Follow up interviews were also conducted with individuals who identified as LGBT and who had achieved post secondary degrees. The purpose of the data collection in this case was to “understand the meaning of the identified phenomena to subjects” (Cowan, 2007, p. 172). The questions were meant to be probing so as to elicit further

questioning and description of the phenomena to the identified participants (Cowan, 2007).

Instrumentation

Questionnaires were provided via an online survey hosting site. The link to the survey was provided to students via internet sites associated with Cal State as well as through departmental email list serves. Surveys were also provided to individuals who had previously attained post secondary degrees via personal email. Those individuals who desired to provide more in-depth information participated in further electronic surveying or telephone interviews. All subjects' identities were kept anonymous and all recorded information was kept confidential. The institution where this research was conducted was also kept anonymous for the purposes of this study and to maintain a sense of confidentiality to allow for greater disclosure from subjects.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Research Questions

To begin a discussion of the study results, it is first important to clearly address the research questions being asked by the researcher. In this study, the researcher endeavored to understand:

1. How are sexual minority students' retention and academic success rates affected by their sexual identity?
2. What improvements can be made on campuses of higher education to help facilitate more impactful experiences for LGBT students?

Data in this study was collected in a dual manner utilizing online, anonymous surveys to collect quantitative data about LGBT individuals' experiences in higher education while simultaneously providing them an opportunity to offer personal experiences and thusly collect rich, qualitative data. To provide a more holistic look at the data, a small number of follow up telephone and in-person interviews were conducted to assist in illustrating the personal experiences of sexual minority students in higher education.

The author chose to collect survey data in two general categories: 1) Background information of the respondents and 2) Personal experiences as an LGBT student in higher education. The first set of questions was collected in an attempt to illuminate current students' sexual identities, openness with their sexual orientations, and basic student

demographics (i.e. class standing, course of study). The questions concerning the research topic area were gathered in an attempt to identify whether or not current LGBT students felt that their sexual identity was in any way linked to their educational experiences and successes and to determine ways in which sexual minority students' current experiences could be enhanced.

Quantitative Data Analysis and Interpretation

The researcher attempted to address two essential research questions. The first question dealt with whether or not student's sexual minority identity was negatively impacting their experiences in higher education. To better understand in what ways LGBT students were being impacted by their sexual identities, the researcher asked a variety of questions in an attempt to illustrate sexual minority students' experiences and comfort levels in academia.

Survey respondents were first asked to self-classify their sexual identities. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of participants by their sexual orientation. Note that participants who identified as Heterosexual were not permitted to complete the remainder of the survey and also that respondents were allowed to mark more than one sexual identity.

Table 1

Demographics of Respondents Sexual Identities ($N=30$)

<u>Lesbian</u>	<u>Gay</u>	<u>Bisexual</u>	<u>Transgender</u>	<u>Questioning</u>	<u>Other</u>
9	5	6	5	4	3

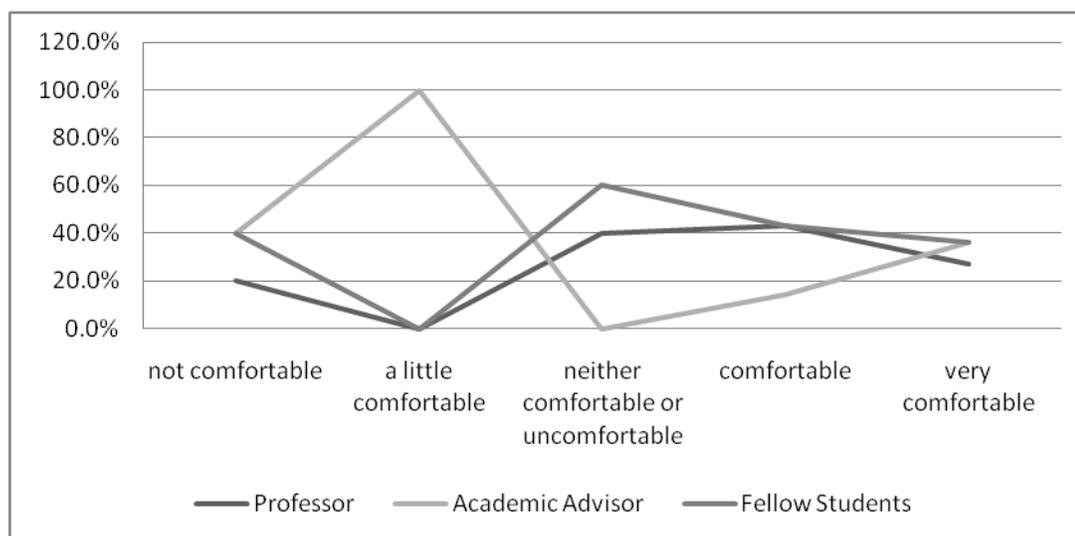
Respondents were then asked to answer a variety of questions to help illuminate their personal comfort levels with their sexual identities in general, and within their educational experiences. Participants were asked to rate their openness concerning their sexual identity, identify who in their lives was aware of their sexual orientations, and to whom they would be comfortable divulging their sexual identities.

The majority of individuals responded that they were quite open with their sexual identities; 23.3% ($N=30$), identified as a 4 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicated “not open at all” and 5 indicated “very open”.

In an attempt to understand participants’ levels of comfort and openness in their academic experiences, questions were asked about who was aware of their sexual orientations. Over 43% ($N=30$) responded that close friends were aware of their sexual identity and 40.0% ($N=30$) said that casual acquaintances were aware of the participants’ sexual identity. Over thirty percent ($N=30$) of respondents said their family members were also aware of the participant’s sexual identity. Interestingly however, only 23.3% ($N=30$) of respondents said that their colleagues or coworkers were aware of their sexual identity and similarly only 23.3% ($N=30$) of individuals indicated that university faculty and/or staff were aware of their sexual orientations. These results suggested that, while students may feel that they are open with their sexual identities with some people in their lives, they were less comfortable divulging their sexual orientations to individuals in formal or authoritative settings, including in the academic arena to an instructor or other faculty member.

Further information about respondents' comfort revealing their sexual identity to individuals in their educational experiences is outlined in Figure 1. Students were asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 how comfortable they would feel divulging their sexual identity to a professor, an academic advisor, and their fellow students where 1 indicates "not comfortable" and 5 indicates "very comfortable". The results suggest once again, that while students feel they are open with their sexual identities, they are less comfortable revealing their sexual minority status in an academic setting to an authority figure. It appears that respondents are most comfortable divulging their sexual identity to their fellow students while they seem equally comfortable disclosing their sexual identity to an academic advisor or a professor.

Figure 1 Levels of Comfort Divulging Sexual Identity to Professors, Academic Advisors, or Fellow Students ($N = 30$)



Participants were also asked to identify their comfort and safety levels on their educational campuses, in general. Participants' responses were overwhelmingly positive

in this arena. Respondents were asked to indicate their comfort level on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating feeling “completely uncomfortable/unsafe” and 5 indicating feeling “completely comfortable/safe”. No individuals indicated that they felt completely unsafe or uncomfortable, 10.0% ($N=30$) indicated neutral comfort/safety with a number 3, 26.6% ($N=30$) indicated a number 4, and 10.0% ($N=30$) indicated feeling completely comfortable or safe on campus with a number “5”. Participants further illustrated the experiences of LGBT students on Cal State’s campus by rating the campus’ tolerance/acceptance of sexual minority students on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 indicating “completely intolerant/un-accepting” and 5 indicating “very tolerant/accepting”. The majority of respondents rated the campus as more accepting than neutral 20.0% ($N=30$), with the second highest rating being neutral at 16.7% ($N=30$). Table 2 outlines the results.

Table 2

Campus Tolerance/Acceptance of Sexual Minorities ($N=30$)

Completely <u>Intolerant</u>	A Little Bit <u>Tolerant</u>	Neither Tolerant or <u>Intolerant</u>	Very <u>Tolerant</u>
0.0%	6.67%	16.7%	20.0%
			3.33%

Overall, participants’ responses suggested that they felt either neutral or relatively comfortable expressing their sexual orientations on campus; however the results also suggest that they feel less comfortable being open about their sexual identities in an academic setting. The responses suggested that students believed that their sexual identities had little effect on their experiences in higher education; simultaneously, their responses indicated that they still find some subtle discomfort intersecting their sexual

identity with their academic experiences. Whether or not a difficulty connecting their sexual identity to their academic experiences is negatively affecting LGBT students' retention rates and academic success is still questionable. Even if LGBT students feel as though they are able to be successful students their discomfort in divulging their sexual identity to their professors and other university faculty and staff implies a certain level of discomfort in their academic settings which could affect their ability to achieve to their greatest capacities.

Qualitative Data Analysis and Interpretation

The writer's second research question addressed improvements that could currently be made to enhance LGBT students' experiences in higher education. The most effective way to analyze subjective data of this type was to allow participants, including post graduate respondents, to provide their personal opinions and suggestions. Through open-ended free response questions participants were asked to provide their personal experiences in higher education currently and what they felt would provide them with a more impactful experience, with the assumption that students who feel more personally engaged in their academic experience are more successful and more likely to be retained. To gather more information about improvements that have been made and could continue to be made, three post graduates of higher education who are now currently employed in the field of education provided follow up interviews.

Participants' responses to the question of what improvements could be made to enhance the educational experiences of sexual minority students varied widely, however

there were some themes that emerged from the data. Overall, respondents indicated that there was a great need for more visibility of LGBT students and issues of sexual identity on campus. They also suggested that there was a need for improved relationships between authority figures on campus and LGBT students. Finally, respondents indicated that the campus was currently lacking resources and services specifically dedicated to LGBT students and issues of sexual identity.

Greater visibility for issues of sexual minorities on campuses of higher education was clearly important to many respondents. The literature suggests that LGBT students are still often absent on campuses of higher education (D'Augelli, 1989). One student put it simply, stating, "Talk about it [issues of sexual identity], not just ignoring it or assuming everyone knows about sexual minorities and the facts about sexual identity". Issues of sexual identity need to be made visible and discussed in public forums of higher education so that LGBT students on campus feel as if they are able to connect to and engage with their campus. A lack of visibility was also felt within the curriculum on campus. Allen (1995) summarized what much of the literature (Clift, 1988; Eyre, 1993) states about issues of sexual identity in higher education that there is a lack of "scholarly attention to sexual orientation" (p. 141). This was echoed by a respondent who stated that "the topic of sexual orientation and sexual identity in general should find its way into more of our classes' curriculum". One of the post graduate respondents repeated this need for greater visibility of sexual identity in curriculum stating that in his higher educational experience, as an undergraduate in 1978, he had only one course where "homophobia was mentioned, that was it". He further elaborated that he felt there was a great need to

include sexual identity issues into all aspects of education at all levels. He stated that issues of sexual identity needed to be “taught and recognized like anything or anybody else”, implying that sexual identity needed to be included as an assumed piece of all curriculums and coursework, rather than an addition or a topic that is relegated only to certain subjects. As Tinto (1975, 1982, 1988, 2006) has illustrated throughout the years, it is clear that students need to feel as though they are integrated into their academic experience in order to be most academically successful. Sanlo et al. (2002) noted as well, that “some minority students might experience lower satisfaction with college, perhaps leading to lower retention and persistence rates than those of the majority students” (p. 34). As past studies have shown, (Tinto 1975, 1982, 1988, 2006) students that feel connected to their campuses are more likely to succeed academically; therefore if LGBT students are feeling less connected to the campus as a whole they are less likely to be successful.

An integral part of feeling connected to the campus and their educational experiences are effective and nurturing relationships between students and their instructors (Cornelius-White, 2007; McCombs, 2004). LGBT students at Cal State echoed this need to feel a connection with authority figures on campus. One student suggested that faculty and staff could “just show warmth’ to sexual minority students. Additional participants who were asked what the largest contributing factor was to their academic success thus far stated that it was “some caring faculty” and “open and accepting professors”. Their responses suggest that instructor-student relationships are important in that they impact student success which has been demonstrated in previous

literature as well (Cornelius-White, 2007; McCombs 2004; McCombs & Whisler, 2007). If nothing else, sexual minority students need to feel safe in their academic environment (Sanlo, 2004). The climate of the classroom experience is greatly impacted by the instructor in it. One student illustrated how faculty made a difference in his or her academic experience, stating “I appreciate that the instructors that support equality voice their opinion[s]”. Two of the post graduate respondents confirmed that it was important that faculty advocate for greater visibility of issues of sexual identity, one respondent stated that it was important that “Gay individuals” were recruited for positions within higher education to help increase visibility of sexual identity topics. Sanlo (2004) discussed the effect of a lack of advocacy and a feeling of safety, saying, “students who worry about an unsupportive environment and harassment are unable to focus on either academic or co-curricular learning” (p. 97). This feeling of distraction by feeling unsafe, or hidden was reiterated by one of the post-graduate respondents a White, female individual in her mid-thirties who attended a small, conservative liberal arts college. She illustrated that she wished she had simply “had someone to talk to” and that she felt that she was agonizing over exploring her sexual orientation alone, that she felt there were no safe, recognizable individuals that she could speak with, and therefore felt that her academic endeavors were being taken away from. Even if instructors are unable to form deep, rich relationships with all of their students, it is imperative for their students’ success that they endeavor to create spaces where students feel safe and protected.

Respondents also indicated that in order to enhance their academic experiences there was a need for more comprehensive resources dedicated specifically to LGBT

students and issues of sexual identity. While Cal State does currently have a LGBT resource center on campus that can be utilized by all students, faculty and staff on campus, many respondents felt that it was lacking in services and resources. One respondent stated that the most important thing that could be done to create a more impactful experience for LGBT students was to fund the current center at a “decent rate”, the respondent however failed to include an identification of what they believed adequate funding would entail. Another student participant echoed a need for an expansion of the center stating, “I think the campus could have more/better resources for the community” and that the current center is “so small and limited – what kind of message is this sending”? LGBT students believe that there is little money and effort currently dedicated to sexual minorities on campus and indicated that while they are currently succeeding academically, their experiences and success rates could be improved should these resources be improved. All post graduate respondents echoed a need for greater, more diverse services directed specifically at LGBT students. One post graduate respondent indicated that while it is important to have very visible resources, she felt that more confidential options needed to be included so that questioning or fearful students have an opportunity to receive services without having to “publically out themselves”. Another post graduate respondent asserted that his experiences working in the LGBT center as an undergraduate, were highly influential on his academic and personal experiences in higher education. He suggested that because he found this community and resource he felt that his sexual orientation positively affected his educational experience. He also felt that through the resource center he was first able to truly learn about issues of sexual

identity and connect with other advocates. Sanlo et al. (2002) also asserted that “LGBT students are arriving on campuses every year with the expectations that their voices will be heard, their concerns acknowledged and their needs met, and their educational environments welcoming” (p. xv). The data suggests that LGBT students do not believe that enough money and effort is being dedicated specifically to services for them, therefore LGBT students believe that they could be more adequately served if more time, energy, and/or funding were devoted to assisting them. It is important to note however that due to the current desperate financial climate in California in higher education it is likely that all extracurricular student services outside of admissions and records management services are likely to be perceived by students as inadequate.

Campus Climate

While many respondents indicated that they feel they were not being discriminated against on campus and that their academic experiences were not being negatively affected by their sexual identities, they still indicated that there were many ways that academic experiences could be improved for sexual minority students. LGBT students may currently be succeeding academically, but perhaps not at the levels they could be if academic environments were altered. Their opinions expressed during the interview process were consistent with responses to the online survey, where respondents typically did not feel “unsafe” on campus.

Whether or not students felt safe does not, however, address their perceptions of their abilities to be academically successful in the current on-campus environment.

Interview participants were asked if they felt the environment could be improved in any way that might enhance their educational experience.

Improvements

Overall, students suggested that while they were currently academically successful, there are still many ways in which improvements could be made that would subsequently improve their higher education experiences. The main themes of their responses were:

- Greater visibility of LGBT students and issues of sexual identity,
- Improved relationships between authority figures and LGBT students, and
- More comprehensive resources specifically dedicated to LGBT students and issues of sexual identity.

Though there is no current concrete data that describes current faculty-student relationships, the issue was addressed by interview respondents more than once, suggesting that there is a need for further exploration and understanding of that phenomenon. The available research literature, though primarily regarding K-12 student-teacher relationships, suggests that relationship is a critical component of academic achievement, regardless of grade level.

Summary

The study results indicated that LGBT students at Cal State felt that they are not being overtly discriminated against on campus. That students did not believe their campus environment to be “unsafe” is suggestive of some level of progress in the

nationwide movement for positive recognition of LGBT identities and lives. However, they also felt that there were several ways in which educational experiences could be enhanced for sexual minorities. Not surprisingly, they felt the openness of the campus climate would be improved if others in the environment were explicit in their inclusion of LGBT concerns. The data contained suggestions that teachers could include LGBT perspectives more in their curricula, and could be more vocal in their support of LGBT inclusion. That, of course, presumes that teachers are not silent because of a lack of acceptance of support. This study did not explore faculty perceptions or behaviors with regard to LGBT students; therefore, while students may perceive faculty were supportive, no data is currently available to demonstrate that.

While the majority of respondents indicated that they felt comfortable on campus, and that their sexual identities were not negatively affecting their educational experiences, they simultaneously indicated that they felt some discomfort in divulging their sexual identities to many individuals on campuses. The data suggested that perhaps there is some subtle uneasiness or internal conflict felt by sexual minority students in higher education. While the study results did not concretely determine whether or not sexual minority students are less likely to be retained or are successful academically, they did show that LGBT students are still in need of further resources and support on campus. It is also clear that there is still great need for additional study of this population, including longitudinal studies of retention and success rates.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Following a review of the current literature concerning sexual minority students in higher education, the researcher found there to be a distinct lack of data concerning the academic success, retention and experiences of LGBT students. This study utilized anonymous questionnaires to gather information about the academic experiences of sexual minority students in higher education. Participants were sampled from a metropolitan campus in California during the academic period between Fall of 2009, and Spring 2010. Sexual minority students elaborated about their personal views on their educational experiences, their comfort levels with their sexual identity, and their comfort and security in the academic environment. Data collected was used to draw inferences about whether or not LGBT students' at Cal State are having less impactful experiences in higher education are therefore may be less likely to be retained than their heterosexual peers.

Conclusions

Higher education cannot function without students to serve – a fact that is highly recognized by educators throughout the world. In an attempt to understand why some students achieve degrees and are ultimately successful, educational researchers at all levels have endeavored to comprehend the greater phenomenon of student retention.

Educators in higher education have made every attempt to understand why it is that successful students are just that, successful, and why others fail to effectively navigate the confines of higher education.

A piece of understanding the deeply studied phenomenon of retention is being aware of, and evaluating, the ever-changing student population in the context of the simultaneously ever-changing culture of higher education. Retention in higher education has been studied in various student populations on various campuses in regards to specific characteristics (i.e. socioeconomic class, gender, race/ethnicity, and/or the intersection of any characteristics etc.) that may or may not affect success. Unfortunately, the educational experiences of one population, sexual minority students, and their success and retention rates have been largely left unstudied.

There is a clear deficiency of literature and research concerning the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered students on campuses of higher education. While research is inconclusive as to the exact numbers of LGBT individuals in the greater population or within higher education populations, it is clear that sexual minority students do exist in higher education. Unfortunately, little is being done to recruit and assist these students to successful completion of higher education and additionally there is little to create impactful experiences for sexual minority students.

Through the examination of the study results analyzed here many conclusions can be drawn about the experiences of LGBT students at Cal State. The study results indicated that LGBT students at Cal State feel that they are not being overtly discriminated against; however, later in the survey when they were asked what could be

done to improve the experiences of sexual minority students, many indicated that improvements could be made. Several students suggested that sexual minority perspectives are not often included in the curriculum. This was also indicated in the interviews that were conducted, suggesting that very little progress has been made in this area over the past decade.

Where progress has been made is in terms of campus culture and attitudes. Students at Cal State indicated that they felt safe on campus. The post-graduate LGBT individuals indicated that this had not been the case in their higher educational experiences. While the interviewees did not experience outright discrimination or hateful behavior due to their sexual orientation, they felt very fearful in divulging their sexual orientation on their respective campuses. Current students at Cal State noted that they feel their campus is tolerant and accepting of LGBT students; however, many simultaneously indicated that they would not be comfortable divulging their sexual orientations to staff and faculty in higher education.

While the majority of students past and current indicate that they feel that their sexual orientation does not negatively affect their educational experiences, they still found many areas for improvement. So what does this mean for current institutions of higher education? Sexual Minority students indicate that their sexual orientation is not affecting their educational experience – however they feel that there are still deficiencies within higher education in terms of sexual minority perspectives and support services. The entrenched heteronormativity in higher education is obviously still affecting LGBT individuals and heterosexual students, as well as the larger campus population.

Recommendations and Implications

The fight for equal opportunities, visibility, and rights for sexual minorities in the United States will clearly continue for many years to come. With a history of heteronormativity within the greater population and institutions of the United States, institutions of higher education have not been free of these indirect forms of oppression to this minority population.

In order to best gather rich, personal data that is applicable to current LGBT students in higher education, subjects were asked directly what they felt could be done currently to enhance the educational experiences of sexual minority students in higher education. The responses varied widely but many suggestions were made.

One recommendation that was made by both current students and post graduate students was including more diverse perspectives in all curriculums in higher education. One current subject articulated this need eloquently, “I think the topic of sexual orientation and sexual identity in general should find its way into more of our classes’ curriculum. It does not need to be, and should not be limited to only human sexuality or certain psychology classes”. As this student noted when issues of sexual minorities do make it into curriculum in higher education they are segregated to the social sciences. Students noted also that it was important to simply talk about sexual minorities, the issues they face and the facts about sexual identity in and outside of the classroom on campuses of higher education. As is demonstrated by these examples, what is suggested by the data is the great need for visibility of sexual minority individuals, students, faculty, staff etc., on campuses of higher education.

Research has shown that students are more successful when they can recognize individuals in power with whom they can identify. It is imperative for the success of LGBT students that they can distinguish role models on campus that they can look up to. Heterosexual individuals also will gain rich experiences and information about sexual minorities by making LGBT individuals, students, faculty, and staff, visible and by creating opportunities for within which to heterosexual individuals can interact with sexual minorities.

Included in the need for visibility and experience is a need for training on current campuses. One student noted “Utilize ‘Safe Zone’ training and post advocacy banners and buttons in and around student services office”. Safe Zone is a program created by GLSEN that endeavors to create visibly “safe” places for LGBT students; these spaces are usually marked by a visible, recognizable LGBT symbol such as a rainbow sticker or pink triangle. Training students and staff about the issues that are currently facing sexual minority students helps once again to create visibility for LGBT individuals on campuses of higher education. Training staff and faculty is also necessary to better assist sexual minority students. LGBT students who may be feeling less than included need to be assured that somewhere on campus they have safe places and individuals who will support them and speak out for them. One student noted that “Campuses need to be entities of advocacy, and university and college staff and faculty need to actively advocate”. LGBT students need to not only recognize role models they need to feel that they are being supported and that there are individuals on campus who are campaigning for their needs and their success as well.

Intimately tied to the issue of visibility is the need for resources, specifically dedicated to issues of sexual minority students on campuses of higher education. Many campuses of higher education have no resources purposely designed to advocate for and assist LGBT students. If a campus does have a resource center designed to promote sexual minority students, not only do LGBT students suffer but also heterosexual individuals who ultimately lack exposure to this population and continue to inhabit an educational community that furthers the entrenched heteronormativity. One subject summed up the failing resources for sexual minority students at their institution stating, “I think the campus could have more/better resources for the [LGBT]community, such as the [LGBT] center; it’s so small and limited – what kind of message is this sending”?. Clearly, the current resources made available to LGBT students to support them both personally and academically are currently lacking or worse, non-existent. Increased funding to supplement current programs or initiate new programs on campuses of higher education is an area that has been severely deficient. Interviewees noted similar experiences and suggestions. Many noted that in their experiences in higher education there were little or no resources available to sexual minority students. Those programs that were available did not create safe environments where LGBT students felt that they could gain the resources they so desperately needed, especially on campuses where tolerance and acceptance of sexual minority students was lacking.

While progress has clearly been made in terms of the rights of and advocacy for LGBT students of higher education improvement is still obviously necessary. The clear deficiency of research that the researcher found on the topic of LGBT students’ academic

experiences in higher education and the lack of data concerning LGBT students retention and academic success alone is an indicator that there is still progress to be made. Students beliefs that their campuses are tolerant of sexual minority students and that they feel that their sexual orientation is not negatively affecting their academic experience is promising and suggests that improvement has been made in popular culture and in campus cultures. However, while LGBT students stated that they felt no biases due to their sexual orientation, when asked for ways in which to enhance their educational experiences they manage to find a myriad of ways in which to improve – suggesting that deep-rooted heteronormativity still exists and is still indirectly affecting LGBT students' experiences in higher education.

Are fewer LGBT students being retained to graduation? Is this population succeeding less often academically or less fully? It may be very difficult for researchers to collect concrete numbers about this data. However, it can be argued that when one student population suffers, the entire academic community does as well. If sexual minority students are present in smaller numbers, or are fearful of expressing their identity fully in their experience in higher education, not only do they suffer personally (and most likely, indirectly academically) but so does the rest of the campus community, as they lose a rich part of the diverse academic population that enhances the community and the academic experiences of all.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate in Research

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Sarah Driver, a student in Educational Leadership at California State University, Sacramento. The study will investigate the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and/or Transgender (LGBT) students in higher education and whether or not their sexual identity has affected their educational experience and their ability to be retained to degree completion.

You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire about your academic goals and your experiences as a sexual minority student in higher education at Cal State (name changed for confidentiality). The questionnaire may require up to an hour of your time. You will be able to submit the questionnaire anonymously. Some of the items in the questionnaire may seem personal, but you may choose not to answer any question you do not want to.

You may find the questionnaire helpful as a reflection on your personal academic experiences and your experiences as a sexual minority student, or you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the results of this study will improve access to resources for LGBT students in higher education and improve the experiences of LGBT students at Cal State (name changed for confidentiality) and other institutions of higher education.

You will be able to complete and submit the questionnaire without divulging any identifying information. This study is completely anonymous. By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research. Your responses will be kept confidential to the degree permitted by the technology used. Survey Monkey (the online survey questionnaire host being used) has been instructed not to record the email addresses or IP addresses of participants in this survey.

You will not receive any compensation for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Sarah Driver at (858) 736-7219 or by sarahbdriver@gmail.com.

Your participating in this research is entirely voluntary. By selecting 'I Agree' you acknowledge your informed consent to participate in this study.

- I Agree
- I Do Not Agree

(No signature will be collected as this is an anonymous survey)

APPENDIX B
Survey Questions

SURVEY QUESTIONS

Background Questions

1. Do you identify yourself as:
 - a. Lesbian
 - b. Gay
 - c. Bisexual
 - d. Heterosexual
 - e. Transgender
 - f. Questioning
 - g. Other (Please indicate how you most comfortably identify your sexual orientation)
2. Please rate how open you are regarding your sexual identity on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not open at all and 5 being very open.
3. Please indicate if the following individuals are aware of your sexual identity (check all that apply)
 - a. Family
 - b. Close Friends
 - c. Casual Acquaintances
 - d. Colleagues/Coworkers
 - e. University Faculty/Staff (professors, advisors, etc)
4. Please indicate how comfortable you would feel divulging your sexual identity to the following individuals using a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being not comfortable at all and 5 being extremely comfortable:
 - a. A professor
 - b. An Academic Advisor
 - c. Fellow students
5. Please indicate if you use the following resources on campus (check all that apply)
 - a. Professor/TA office Hours
 - b. Your Major Advisors Office Hours
 - c. The LGBT resource Center (name changed for confidentiality)
 - d. Other Counseling Services
6. Are you currently a Cal State (name changed for confidentiality) undergraduate student? If yes please answer the following:
 - a. What is your class standing?
 - b. What is your major?
7. Are you currently a Cal State (name changed for confidentiality) graduate student? If yes please answer the following:

- a. What year of study are you in?
- b. What is your area of study?
- c. What degree are you pursuing?

Research Topic Area

1. Please rate your educational experience thus far on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being completely unsatisfied and 5 being very satisfied.
2. What is the biggest challenge that has affected your academic experience/endeavors thus far?
3. What has been the largest contributing factor to your academic success thus far?
4. What services, academic or otherwise, do you feel will (or would) assist you in achieving your academic goals?
5. Do you feel that your sexual identity has affected your academic experience in any way, positively or negatively? If yes, how so?
6. Please rate your comfort level on campus (i.e. do you feel safe, at ease etc) on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being completely uncomfortable/unsafe and 5 being very comfortable/safe.
7. Please rate how tolerant/accepting the campus is of sexual minorities (i.e. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex etc) on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being completely intolerant/accepting and 5 being very tolerant/accepting.
8. Have you experienced bias or discrimination at Cal State (name changed for confidentiality) because of your sexual identity? If yes please elaborate on what ways.
9. Have you ever sought academic support services (i.e. advising, tutoring etc)?
10. Have you ever sought other support services (i.e. personal counseling etc)?
11. What do you feel the campus, staff, and instructors could do to enhance the educational experiences of sexual minority students?

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