A STUDY OF ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFY AS LESBIAN OR GAY

A Thesis

Presented to the faculty of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
California State University, Sacramento

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Education

(Higher Education Leadership)

by

Mai Thuy Nguyen

SPRING
2014
A STUDY OF ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER AMERICAN STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFY AS LESBIAN OR GAY

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Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

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Brief Literature Review

The college experience is defined by whose lens is filtering the perspective. The developmental processes of both the Asian/Pacific Islander American identity and lesbian and gay identity provide an understanding of the unique needs of each identity. However, examining the intersectionality of these identities would offer a more accurate account of what this population would experience. Determining what unique needs this student population has will allow institutions of higher education to provide better support services. Social identities influence one’s sense of campus climate and one’s perception of their sense of belonging, ultimately defining a positive versus a negative college experience.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to analyze the experiences of Asian/Pacific Islander American students who identify as lesbian or gay to determine factors that may affect this
population’s collegiate career at a four-year institution of higher education in a metropolis area in Northern California.

Methodology

The researcher recruited five individuals through random purposeful sampling technique. The data were gathered for the participants’ responses to semi-structured interview questions. The questions revolved around themes identified from existing literature of campus climate, campus resources, campus/civic involvement, peer interactions, classroom climate, faculty interactions, transition to campus, identity development, and satisfaction and sense of belonging. The researcher analyzed the interviews to determine common themes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Three prominent themes emerged about social identity challenges, connection to campus, and faculty influence. Participants described challenges they faced in regard to their Asian/Pacific Islander American and/or lesbian or gay identity. Four of the five participants revealed their involvement with at least one student organization and the significant impact their organization had on their sense of belonging. One of the most prevalent themes found was the weight of influence faculty members had on a student’s learning, comfort level, inspiration as a role model, and overall college experience.

______________________________, Committee Chair
Francisco Reveles, Ed.D.

______________________________
Date
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my parents, who immigrated here after the Vietnam War and accomplished so much even though they started with little to nothing. You have shown me that success and happiness are created through hard work, determination, and a good sense of humor.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family for their continual support in my pursuit of higher education. I would also like to acknowledge all those who influenced me to pursue the path I have taken. Without your knowledge, mentoring, and posed challenges, I would not be where I am today. For that, I am forever thankful.

S. Mikiko Kumasaka led me to think outside the box when it comes to community and to be confident in my identities. Marcus Elliot always entertained my random rants and conversations about life, which led me to realize more about myself than ever expected. Bridget Johnson challenged me to think of myself as a leader and about what positive changes I could make in a community. Kerry Wenzler demonstrated the balance and joy of the higher education profession as well as providing a direction to explore the field. Michael Speros continued to encourage and challenge me to do what was best for me. And thank you to those to come in the future.

I would also like to acknowledge those who directly supported me with this study. I would not have been able to do this without the advisement of Dr. Francisco Reveles, Dr. José Chávez, Dr. Geni Cowan, and Dr. Greg Kim-Ju.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Topic

Within the realm of higher education, American institutions aim to create educational environments conducive to student success (Bonner, Jennings, Chen, & Singh, 2006; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). According to Accapadi (2012), “As the landscape of higher education diversifies, it is increasingly necessary to understand the topography if we are to meet the needs of today’s college students” (p. 59). A great portion of these needs surround the notion of nurturing social-identity development within the college, which creates a necessity for empirical evidence to guide the services and programs required to promote and foster student success.

Identity development is often most significant to an individual when immersed in a college setting (Stevens, 2004) and could then influence a student’s role within a society (Adams et al., 2000). There have been numerous research efforts to better understand the college experience of lesbian and gay students regarding their sexual-identity development. There have also been numerous studies conducted to better understand the Asian/Pacific Islander American (APIA) college experience regarding their racial-identity development. The greatest challenge in researching APIA identity development is to understand that each ethnic group within the APIA races has different cultural influences based on values and beliefs (Phinney, 1990; Torres, Howard-
Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Yeh & Huang, 1996). Researchers must study each ethnic identity separately and cannot simply group them together.

Over the years research has progressed in the separate fields of sexual-identity development and APIA racial-identity development, but there has been a lack of research about the holistic college experience of the two intersecting social identities. According to Dugan and Yurman (2011), the college experience is influenced by the multiple dimensions of one’s socially constructed identity that shape developmental processes as well as an individual’s worldview. Therefore, campus climate and student engagement play a significant role in student success.

Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007) defined student engagement as follows:

Student engagement represents two critical features. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities….The second component of student engagement is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation. (p. 44)

Understanding the holistic experience of lesbian and gay APIA students allows their needs to be determined so institutions of higher education can create environments conducive to the success of this population.
Statement of the Problem

American culture has continued to evolve in the understanding and acceptance of lesbian, gay, and APIA individuals. The higher education culture has progressed in providing resources, programs, and services available to these student populations. However, the lesbian and gay APIA student population experiences different needs than the White lesbian and gay student population. The aim of this study was to analyze the experiences of APIA students who identify as lesbian or gay to determine factors that may affect this population’s collegiate career at a four-year institution of higher education in a metropolis area in Northern California.

Significance of the Study

According to the United States Census Bureau (2012), Asians were the fastest growing racial group in America between the years 2000 and 2010. According to the United States Census Bureau (2014), approximately 16.75 million people identified as Asian/Pacific Islander in the United States in 2013, with 5.5 million of that population residing in the state of California. California has institutions of higher education considered Asian-serving institutions, meaning at least 10% of the student population identify as Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander (United States Department of Education, 2014). “As we develop an inclusion-centered approach to higher education, we need a deeper dialogue on the identity exploration process of Asian
American students” (Accapadi, 2012, p. 59). Asian/Pacific Islander students have different needs than their White counterparts, so there is a significant need to better understand this population to best serve them.

Institutions typically do not have an indicator to determine how many students identify as lesbian or gay (Dugan & Yurman, 2011). “Thus, the degree to which institutions are able to respond to the unique needs of LGB students is hindered by the limited research on their broad collegiate experiences” (Dugan & Yurman, 2011, p. 202). “Understanding variations in student attitudes toward members of these social groups can help us develop strategies to confront existing negative attitudes and develop opportunities to improve interactions and the overall campus climate” (Holley, Larson, Adelman, & Trevino, 2007, p. 80). Students, faculty, and staff must be multiculturally competent and bring these skills into the classroom and into the programs and services provided by the campus to create an environment conducive to success. Support services commonly offered at institutions typically serve one identity or the other but rarely serve these intersecting identities. Understanding the lesbian and gay APIA student perspective will aide in understanding their experiences and in determining what programs, services, and strategies, if any, need to be created to foster this population’s identity developments.
Definition of Terms

The following is a list of special terms and their definitions used in the study.

Asian/Pacific Islander American (APIA)

Defined as an individual born in the United States of America who identifies with a nationality from Far East Asia, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands. Such national identities include Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Guam, Hawaii, Hmong, India, Japan, Korea, Laos, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Samoa, Taiwan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Sikkim (Bonner et al., 2006).

Ethnic Identity

Defined as “a multidimensional construct, involving ethnic feelings, attitudes, knowledge and behaviors” (Phinney, 1995, p. 58). The multidimensional construct refers to characteristics such as “nationality, ancestry, religion, language, culture, and history to which personal and social meanings of group identity are usually attached” (Cokley, 2007, p. 518).

Gay

Defined as a term used to describe male-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other male-identified people

Lesbian

Defined as a term used to describe female-identified people attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other female-identified people
Oppression

The systematic subjugation of a group of people by another group with access to social power, the result of which benefits one group over the other, and is maintained by social beliefs and practices.

Privilege

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people

Racial Identity

Defined as the acknowledgement, recognition, and impact of oppression based on race as the means by which one comes to formulate one’s identity (Alvarez & Helms, 2001)

Organization of Thesis

This document is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 serves as an introduction to the study. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature organized by subtopics. The literature review examines three major areas: (a) the social-identity development of students who identify as APIA, lesbian, or gay and the intersecting identities; (b) the campus climate regarding the abovementioned social identities; and (c) sense of belonging on campus. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study. Chapter 4 examines and analyzes the data from this study and leads to Chapter 5, which discusses the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The goal of this study was to better understand the holistic experiences of APIA students who identify as lesbian or gay. Thus, the study focused on the experiences of this student population at a four-year institution of higher education located in a metropolitan area in Northern California. The study focused on three primary areas: (a) social-identity development of the student, (b) campus climate, and (c) sense of belonging.

According to Dugan and Yurman (2011), “Empirical research on the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) college student population continues to lag behind that of other identity-based groups, despite the developmental importance of the college years for these students” (p. 201). There is an even scarcer amount of research focusing on the intersectionality of racial/ethnic and sexual identities. Asian Americans are the most ethnically diverse group in the country (Evans et al., 2010); therefore, it is difficult to study the identity as a whole without studying the separate ethnic identities (Torres et al., 2003). This study was limited by not separating student experiences by ethnic identities. However, analyzing the intersectionality of this population in general provides some insight into this student population.
Social-Identity Development

To understand the holistic college experiences of students, students’ various identity development must also be considered. Rogers (1990) stated that “student development is the concern for the development of the whole person” (p. 27). A specific aspect of student development is social-identity development. Research focusing on social-identity development was sparked in the United States by the Black civil rights movement in the 1960s (Evans et al., 2010). Since that time, various social-identity development theories have been established focusing on gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and multi-ethnicity. According to Baxter Magolda (2003), racial-identity exploration can be used as the central point of entry for student empowerment, and programs can be created that positively affect students’ experiences. This section reviews the racial-identity development theories, sexual-identity development theories, and multiple-identities development theories.

Asian/Pacific Islander American Identity

Many theories focus on identity development. There are two theories focused specifically on Asian American identity development. The theories are Kim’s (2001) Asian American identity-development model and Accapadi’s (2012) point of entry model of Asian American identity consciousness.

Kim’s Asian American identity development model. According to Alvarez and Helms (2001), racial identity includes the acknowledgement, recognition, and impact of oppression based on race to formulate one’s identity. In understanding the APIA identity
development, the most prominent model is Kim’s (2001) Asian American identity-development model (AAID). According to Kim’s Asian American identity-development model, five stages of development occur: (a) ethnic awareness, (b) White identification, (c) awakening to social and political consciousness, (d) redirection to an Asian American consciousness, and (e) incorporation (Accapadi, 2012; Evans et al., 2010; Kim 2001).

As defined in Accapadi (2012) and Evans et al. (2010), ethnic awareness is the recognition of one’s ethnic identity, which comes from being around one’s social communities, exposure to cultural activities, and ethnic-group involvement. White identification exhibits itself with the individual’s realization of being different from his or her peers, which may lead students to “whitewash” their identity with the goal of fitting in and being accepted. Awakening to social and political consciousness is a dramatic shift of consciousness in which students become conscious of their political and social identity beyond the “White lens.” Redirection to an Asian American consciousness is marked by a search for histories not taught and immersion in the Asian American experience. Incorporation is the result of a sense of resolution with one’s Asian American identity (Accapadi, 2012; Evans et al., 2010).

**Accapadi’s point of entry model of Asian American identity consciousness.**

According to Accapadi (2012), the point of entry model of Asian American identity consciousness (POE model) comprises a more inclusive perspective of the diversity of Asian American communities by including Asian, Pacific Islander, and Desi American (APIDA). The POE model presents the idea that individuals can begin exploring their
racial identities by engaging in their other identities. The model focuses on six factors that may have an effect on Asian American identity formation: (a) ethnic attachment, (b) self as others, (c) familial influence, (d) immigration history, (e) external influences and perceptions, and (f) other social identities (Accapadi, 2012, p. 73).

As defined by Accapadi (2012), ethnic attachment is the immersion (or lack of immersion) in ethnic identity (this may be influenced by religious practice, cultural norms, and language), which then influences how likely one might be to explore an Asian American identity. Self as others encompasses individuals recognizing their own phenotypic features – and how they are treated based on stereotypes attached to these features – as defining their race consciousness. Familial influence is the internalized messages received from family, which naturally emerge from a family structure.

Immigration history is the experience of individuals based on how far removed they are from their Asian American immigration history. External influences and perceptions are factors that may affect individuals’ racial-identity exploration, including experiences of racism, White perceptions and treatment of Asian Americans, other people of color’s perceptions and treatment of Asian Americans, and political climate. The other social-identity factor involves considering the intersections of other social identities as major points of entry into Asian American identity exploration (Accapadi, 2012).

**Lesbian and Gay Identity**

Alfred Kinsey began researching human sexuality in the 1940s; his research resulted in clearer understanding of the concept of homosexuality versus heterosexuality
(Bollough, 1998). Since then, an enormous amount of research has focused on lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identity development. Research focusing on LGB-identity development continues to this day, providing extensive literature addressing the complexities of social-identity development.

“The first important studies of same-sex attraction, which in the past was considered pathological, focused on identifying its ‘cause’ in order to find a ‘cure’” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 306). Dugan and Yurman (2011) noted, “It is within the higher education context that many students begin to explore and/or disclose their sexual identities, positioning college and university environments in potentially high levels of influence on this process” (p. 201). Three major theories are commonly cited when discussing sexual-identity development: Cass’s (1996) model of sexual orientation identity formation, Fassinger’s (1998) model of gay and lesbian identity development, and D’Augelli’s (1994) model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development.

**Cass’s model of sexual orientation identity formation.** Cass’s (1996) model consists of seven stages, including a pre-stage. The pre-stage is when individuals see themselves as heterosexual and then their perceptions may change, causing conflict “between self-concept, behavior, and the perceptions of others” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 308), leading the individual to move into a new stage or identity foreclosure. The six stages are (a) identity confusion, (b) identity comparison, (c) identity tolerance, (d) identity acceptance, (e) identity pride, and (f) identity synthesis.
As defined by Cass (1996) and Evans et al. (2010), identity confusion is when an individual experiences confusion, curiosity, or anxiety from becoming aware that his or her behavior or feelings could be labeled as gay or lesbian. The primary focus of this stage is reducing discomfort. Identity comparison is when individuals have accepted the possibility that they may be gay or lesbian and must determine how to manage their social identity as non-heterosexual, which may range from ostracism to relief. Identity tolerance is when individuals acknowledge they are probably gay or lesbian and seek out others with similar identities to reduce feeling isolated. Identity acceptance is when individuals identify as gay or lesbian and more frequently contact or develop friendships with other gay and lesbian people (Cass, 1996; Evans et al., 2010). Identity acceptance also includes selective disclosure to heterosexual individuals; “The greater commitment to a gay or lesbian identity made at this stage leads to a more stable sense of self” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 309). Identity pride is when the individual focuses on gay issues and activities to minimize contact with heterosexuals and may become an activist to confront an oppressive society. Identity synthesis is when individuals’ sexual identity has become an aspect of who they are rather than their entire identity. They have become more comfortable and secure with their identity, presenting themselves more congruently in both public and private settings. It is in this stage when the individual views the gay/lesbian and heterosexual worlds as less dichotomous and judges others based on personal qualities rather than solely on sexual identity (Cass, 1996; Evans et al., 2010).
Fassinger’s model of gay and lesbian identity development. Fassinger’s (1998) model takes into account the cultural and contextual influences on development (Evans et al., 2010; Fassinger, 1998). According to Fassinger (1998), there are two parallel processes of identity development: individual sexual identity and group membership identity. Both processes consist of a four-phase sequence: (a) awareness, (b) exploration, (c) deepening/commitment, and (d) internalization/synthesis (Evans et al., 2010; Fassinger, 1998).

As defined by Fassinger (1998) and Evans et al. (2010), in the individual sexual-identity development process, awareness is when individuals perceive themselves as different from other people. Exploration begins when individuals actively investigate the feelings of attraction for others of the same sex. Deepening/commitment is when individuals’ sense of self as gay or lesbian is strengthened and becomes more secure and internalized. The final stage of internalization/synthesis is when individuals’ sexual identity becomes a part of their overall identity. When defining the stages regarding the group membership identity-development process, awareness is when one cognizant of the existence of people with different sexual orientations. Exploration is when individuals explore their relationships to the gay and/or lesbian community. Deepening/commitment is when personal commitments are made to the lesbian and gay community, accepting the possibility of negative consequences from being a part of this group. Internalization/synthesis is when the individual internalizes a minority-group identity across contexts (Evans et al., 2010; Fassinger, 1998).
Fassinger’s model is unique because the individual coming out to others is not required for identity integration (Evans et al., 2010). According to Fassinger (1998), an individual could be in different phases in each of these processes, but development in one area of the model could influence development in the other. Depending on the environmental contexts the individual experiences, an individual may cycle through these stages again (Evans et al., 2010).

**D’Augelli’s model of lesbian, gay, and bisexual development.** D’Augelli (1994) identified six interactive processes involved in lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development: (a) exiting heterosexual identity, (b) developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status, (c) developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity, (d) becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring, (e) developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status, and (f) entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community (D’Augelli, 1994; Evans et al., 2010).

As defined by D’Augelli (1994) and Evans et al. (2010), exiting heterosexual identity is when individuals recognize their feelings and attractions are nonheterosexual and begin telling others they are lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity status is when individuals develop a unique understanding of their sexual identity and must challenge internalized myths about what it means to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual (D’Augelli, 1994; Evans et al., 2010); “this is done in relationship with others who can confirm ideas about what it means to be nonheterosexual” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 317). Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social
identity is when individuals create a support network of people who know and accept their sexual orientation. Becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring is when individuals disclose their sexual identity to parents and must redefine their relationship after such disclosure (D’Augelli, 1994; Evans et al., 2010). Developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status is more complex than heterosexual relationships because “the lack of cultural scripts directly applicable to lesbian/gay/bisexual people leads to ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also forces the emergence of personal, couple-specific, and community norms, which should be more personally adaptive” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 317). Entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community is not achieved by all individuals in this process, but, if they do, it is when individuals make commitments to social and political action (D’Augelli, 1994; Evans et al., 2010).

Multiple Identities

It was not until the 1990s and into the 2000s that researchers began focusing on the complexity of multiple identities and their extensive overlapping influences and formations (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Evans et al., 2010; Jones, 1997; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). People of color who also identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual may feel they have to choose between a cultural or LGB identity (Chan, 1989). Navigating a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender identity within particular ethnic subcultures can be challenging (Stevens, 2004; Vaccaro, 2006). There are two theories focused on multiple identities: Reynolds and Pope’s (1991) multidimensional
identity model and Jones and McEwen’s (2000) conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity.

**Multidimensional identity model.** To further expand Root’s biracial-identity model, Reynolds and Pope (1991) created the multidimensional identity model, which suggests four possible ways individuals belonging to more than one oppressed group will define their identities: (a) identifying with only one aspect of self; (b) identifying with only one aspect of self, determined by the individual; (c) identifying with multiple aspects of self, but choosing to do so in a segmented fashion; and (d) the individual chooses to identify with the multiple aspects of self.

As defined by Reynolds and Pope (1991) and Jones and McEwen (2000), identifying with only one aspect of self is when individuals choose to identify with only one aspect of their identity in a passive manner; i.e., individuals allow society, community, or family to determine their primary group. Identifying with only one aspect of self that is determined by the individual is an active process of making a conscious choice of self-identification. The choice may cause suppression of another identity to feel more accepted by others. Identifying with multiple aspects of self, but choosing to do so in segmented fashion is when individuals frequently identify with only one of their social identities, determined passively by context rather than actively by choice. The individuals choose to identify with the multiple aspects of self when they have consciously chosen their identities and integrated them into their sense of self (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991).
**Conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity.** Jones and McEwan (2000) expanded Reynolds and Pope’s (1991) model to reflect the changing context individuals may experience in their identity development. At the center of the dimension is the core sense of self, or core identity. The core consists of personal attributes, personal characteristics, and personal identities differing from the individuals’ outside identities or facts of their identities. Surrounding the core, and at times connected to the core, are the external dimensions influenced by context such as gender, class, race, sexual orientation, culture, and religion. The relative salience of each identity dimension to one’s core identity is determined by contextual factors at that moment in time. The model presents the idea that multiple dimensions of one’s identity can be engaged by the individual at any one time as well as simultaneously. The context in which an individual experiences multiple dimensions of identity, both the core and intersecting identity dimensions, is determined by contextual influences such as family background, sociocultural conditions, current life experiences, and career decisions and life planning (Jones & McEwen, 2000) (see Figure 1).
Lesbian or gay Asian/Pacific Islander American identities. When an individual identifies as both APIA and lesbian or gay there is often a clash of identities as the individual must grapple with multiple oppressions (Chan, 1989; Harper, Jernewall, & Zea, 2004; Jones & McEwen, 2000; Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Vaccaro (2006) explained that families of color not only know their child’s race but can often relate to the experiences and developmental challenges related to their racial identity. When identities are shared between parents and their children, the children experience a shared sense of understanding in at least one aspect of their lives, so coming out and claiming a racial identity is unnecessary (Chan, 1989). There is a distinct difference between racial
identity and sexual identity in that lesbian and gay people must come out to their families (Vaccaro, 2006).

Identifying as lesbian or gay may be perceived as a violation of cultural values or rules, and lesbians and gay men can be considered to have conflicting dual identities (Chan, 1989; Harper et al., 2004). According to Chan (1989), “It is likely that conflicting cultural values may help to explain some of the respondents’ reluctance to identify themselves as openly gay” (p. 17). Parents communicate their lack of acceptance of homosexuality yet homosexuality is not something discussed, leading students to be unsure of how to come out to their families (Narui, 2011). Another important challenge is the generational difference, which may include parents who immigrated to the United States versus their children who were born and raised in the United States. “Second-generation and 1.5-generation Asian/American students are often socialized into the U.S. racial hierarchy and use that hierarchy as their frame of reference” (Narui, 2011, p. 1214). It is important to understand how “multiple identities of an LGBT person interact with and affect one another. The development of one identity – such as race – can cause regression or progress in another” (Poynter & Washington, 2005, p. 42).

APIA individuals who identify as lesbian or gay suffer from rejection and stereotypes based on both their racial identity and sexual identity. Chan’s (1989) study found the following:

In Asian cultures being gay is frequently viewed as a rejection of the most important of roles for women and men – that of being a wife and mother for
women and that of a father carrying on the family line through procreation of heirs for men. (p. 17)

In addition, APIAs also suffer from the model-minority stereotype, which creates an image of being “hard working, obedient, and studious” (Narui, 2011, p. 1215). However, an APIA identifying as lesbian or gay “disrupts this image of the ‘model’ Asian/American, making them no longer appear obedient and nondisruptive” (Narui, 2011, p. 1215). Such stereotypes then cause these individuals to feel rejected by the greater majority (Narui, 2011).

For APIAs who identify as lesbian or gay, “the model minority myth is the White standard which complicates the coming out process” (Narui, 2011, p. 1215). It creates a sense of pressure to be a “good homosexual” (Narui, 2011, p. 1215). Such pressure then impacts whether and how these individuals reveal their sexual orientation to others.

The struggle between racial-identity development and sexual-identity development for APIAs causes a sense of separation of identities and requires individuals to identify with one or the other depending on the situation (Chan, 1989). It also causes these individuals to “find themselves in the position of not feeling totally comfortable in either community” (Chan, 1989, p. 19). According to Poynter and Washington (2005):

Possible outcomes include identifying with multiple groups and integrating these identities (such as viewing oneself as both African American and lesbian), identifying with one group exclusively to the detriment of others (for example, a woman portrays herself as Native American culturally and spiritually yet ignores
a public LGBT identity due to fear of reprisal in a dominant Christian environment), or identifying with one group at a given time (for example, a Latino male identifies himself as gay in a predominantly white LGBT community yet does not do so among Latino friends and family). (p. 45)

**Campus Climate**

Over the past three decades, the term campus climate has evolved in definition. According to Kuh (1990), students’ attitudes toward, perceptions of, and feelings about their environment contribute to their view of campus climate. Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) believed campus climate combines compositional diversity, structural diversity, psychological climate, behavioral climate, and institutional history. Rankin and Reason (2008) described campus climate as the prevailing standards, behaviors, and attitudes of people on campus, which are shaped by access and retention, research and scholarship, group relations, university policies, and external relations. Campus climate is an important aspect to examine regarding students who are APIA and identify as lesbian or gay. Many students exponentially develop their social identities during their time at an institution of higher education, but the environment must be conducive to their development (Stevens, 2004). The campus environment has a significant impact on a student’s college experience and outcomes (Cabrera, Nora, Pascarella, Terenzini, & Hagedorn, 1999; Eimers & Pike, 1997; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Museus, 2008; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).
The success of APIA students is often expected because of the model-minority myth. Within the American higher education system, this myth has perpetuated the idea that Asian Americans are high achieving students (Bonner et al., 2006). Yeh (as cited in Bonner et al., 2006) claimed this perception assumes APIA students “are all well-adjusted and high achieving” (p. 394), which then causes programs and services to overlook “the issues and needs of these students, and even exclude them from receiving services or benefits” (p. 394). Such a perception alienates APIA students and makes it difficult for those who are disadvantaged to excel academically.

Regarding lesbian or gay identified students, “effective practice is limited to working with students who are comfortable being out or open about their sexual orientation or gender identity” (Vaccaro, 2006, p. 354) because it is not possible for an institution to differentiate between straight students and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students (Garnets, 2002; Pope, 1995; Vaccaro, 2006). Therefore, campus programs and services for the lesbian and gay community are created based on the needs of those who are out, not those who are closeted.

“Understanding the complexities that culture, community, and religion bring to sexual minorities is important if we are to create environments where these individuals can grow” (Poynter & Washington, 2005, p. 46). According to Narui (2011), “Students of color and GLB students struggle to create a sense of self within the college environment” (p. 1212). Understanding campus climate in terms of environmental variables sheds light on how psychological variables may be affected (Reid &
Radhakrishnan, 2003). This section looks at past findings regarding campus climate, classroom climate, and how these two factors may affect a student’s sense of belonging.

**Campus**

According to Boyer’s (1990) six principles of campus community, there is a belief that a university is a just community, a place where the sacredness of each person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued. Poynter and Washington (2005) claimed the formation of minority-student organizations is propelled by the widespread intolerance, lack of acceptance, and failure of the campus community to create hospitable campus climates. A study by Lagdameo et al. (as cited in Bonner et al., 2006) found students may experience issues of “marginalization, inadequate resources, a lack of diversity among staff, institutionalized privilege, racism, and the need for a safe space on campus” (p. 395).

**Sexuality and campus climate.** According to Holley et al. (2007), lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students experience barriers to their higher education and individual development due to the fear of being outed, isolated, and verbally harassed in addition to the fear of physical violence. Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, and Lee (2007) stated, “LGB students often remain closeted because of the hostile climate they experience on college campuses” (p. 215). Students’ decisions to come out are dependent upon their environmental context or relationships with others at a particular moment (Longerbeam et al., 2007; Narui, 2011).
Two concepts are important for fully understanding lesbian or gay identity development of college students: heterosexism and homophobia (Vaccaro, 2006). According to Blumenfeld (2000), homophobia is fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex. Heterosexism is the institutionalization of a heterosexual norm or standard, which establishes and perpetuates the notion that all people are or should be heterosexual (Blumenfeld, 2000). These two concepts are significant in understanding the challenges rooted in these phenomena that lesbian and gay students face (Comstock, 1991; D’Augelli, 1989, 1992; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 1999). “Being socialized into a culture where being gay is stigmatized can also lead to internalized homophobia or self-hatred” (Vaccaro, 2006, p. 356).

**Race and campus climate.** When examining race and campus climate, the term racism must first be defined. Racism can be defined as the institutional power one group has over another or the belief of one group (Whites) being superior to another (non-Whites) (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Steele (as cited in Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003) found that “different individuals can – and do – experience the same school in dramatically different ways on the basis of race” (p. 264). Students of color are more likely than their White counterparts to perceive their university as non-supportive and “report higher levels of racial tension and discrimination” (Holley et al., 2007, p. 80). Existing literature also suggests underrepresented minorities negatively perceive their campus environment and climate, which adversely affects their academic performance
and self-esteem (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Solorzano, Ceja, and Yosso (2000) revealed the following:

When a collegiate racial climate is positive, it includes at least four elements: (a) the inclusion of students, faculty, and administrators of color; (b) a curriculum that reflects the historical and contemporary experiences of people of color; (c) programs to support the recruitment, retention and graduation of students of color; and (d) a college/university mission that reinforces the institution’s commitment to pluralism. (p. 62)

In examining APIA students who are lesbian and gay, understanding how race may affect the perception of their institution is significant to understanding their college experience.

**Classroom**

A more intimate aspect of campus climate is the classroom environment. The classroom is intimate because a student is placed in a setting with a professor and a group of students for a set period of time. The student often cannot leave class without academic repercussions. Classrooms are also where students can experience microaggressions. As defined by Sue et al. (2007), “Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (p. 271). A microaggression may also involve demeaning implications and other subtle insults toward others due to gender, sexual orientation, and ability status (Sue et al., 2007).
Those who occupy a classroom are the ones who create its environment. Classrooms are influenced by dominant heteronormative and White cultures. Heteronormativity is defined as a view with which one aligns biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles. Classroom instruction taught through heteronormative views creates a less inviting space for lesbian or gay students. Narui (2011) stated, “The structure of these classes made it difficult for [students] to approach their professors, much less consider revealing their sexual orientation to them” (p. 1226). The use of inclusive language creates a more inviting atmosphere for those who identify as lesbian or gay.

**Sense of Belonging**

An understanding of why students may leave their institution gives insight into what resources better support students of varying identities. Tinto’s (1993) model of institutional departure identifies three major sources of student departure: (a) academic difficulties, (b) the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals, and (c) their failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. Tinto (1993) also stated that for students to persist, they need integration into formal (academic performance) and informal (faculty/staff interactions) academic systems and formal (extracurricular activities) and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. Looking specifically into student engagement through student organizations, one can better understand how engagement links to students’
senses of belonging on their campus and the significance in determining factors affecting lesbian and gay APIA students’ college experiences.

**Engagement Through Student Organizations**

Existing literature suggests “the ‘feel’ of a campus can have a major influence on a student’s involvement in campus activities, both academic and social” (Hawkins & Larabee, 2009, p. 181). The more students are academically and socially involved, the more likely they are to continue and graduate college (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1993, 2012; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Students’ comfort levels on their campus correlate to the amount of involvement in which they may be engaged. It is known that student development and learning are more likely to occur when engaged in extracurricular activities (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Kuh et al. (2007) defined student engagement by two significant components:

- The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities.…
- The second component of student engagement is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum, other learning opportunities, and support services to induce students to participate in activities that lead to the experiences and desired outcomes such as persistence, satisfaction, learning, and graduation. (p. 44)

Astin (1993) stated that the peer group is the “single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the college years” (p. 398). Students often feel a sense of belonging to their campus by connecting to a student organization or group of peers.
Poynter and Washington (2005) made the following statement:

Organizations of LGBT students, as well as those of other minority groups, have been accused of self-segregation. Yet many other student organizations are composed of homogeneous interests…students who congregate and communicate on the basis of common interests and identities. In the same way, LGBT and race-based groups form for mutual support as well as to create a basis for connection to the broader campus community. (p. 44)

Students’ successes may be dependent upon the connection individuals have with their peers through shared experiences. Findings at predominantly White campuses found that minority students graduate at a lower rate partly due to their lack of ability in finding membership in the cultures and subcultures (Museus, 2008). According to Narui (2011), “For these students, the college experience was an opportunity to further explore their identity and the role that they had as individuals within each of these discursive environments” (p. 1225).

Existing literature suggests ethnic student organizations positively contribute to a racial/ethnic minority student’s college experience (Museus, 2008); these types of student organizations provide an outlet for students to express their cultural and racial identities (Museus, 2008). Ethnic student organizations also serve as “critical sources of academic, social, and emotional support” (Museus, 2008, p. 579) for students. Ethnic student organizations provide a sense of cultural familiarity and an environment on campus where students can connect with others with similar cultural backgrounds and
understandings (Museus, 2008). According to Museus (2008), there are three components to the concept of cultural familiarity:

First, the ethnic organizations provided a venue at which students could connect with peers who came from similar cultural backgrounds and with whom they shared common cultural knowledge or common group. Second, those shared cultural backgrounds or common groups allowed participants and their peers in the ethnic student organizations to understand each other’s experiences and struggles. Third, participants described how that common ground allowed them to connect on a deeper level with their peers in the ethnic student organizations to which they belonged. (p. 576)

Inkelas (as cited in Museus, 2008) found that participating in ethnic student organizations had a positive impact on students’ commitment to their racial/ethnic communities.

**Leadership Through Student Organizations**

Higher education institutions have served a central purpose of educating and developing student leaders (Dugan & Komives, 2007). According to Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), the college years are when students can and do increase their leadership skills. Dugan and Yurman (2011) found that students involved in “leadership activities relating to an aspect of their identity…[gained] enhance[d] leadership skills, activism, and personal identity” (p. 203). Dugan and Komives (2007) determined that increases in leadership development enhances “the self-efficacy, civic engagement, character development, academic performance, and personal development of students” (p. 8). A
better understanding of the experience of lesbian and gay APIA students can be gained by looking at the relationship between student leadership and social identities while in college.

Museus (2008) found there is a link to advocacy for positive change in one’s community when students were able to express their ethnic identities through participating in ethnic student organizations. Museus (2008) identified three components to the concept of cultural expression and advocacy:

First, students explained how the organizations allowed them to express their cultural identity by educating each other about their own cultural heritages.

Second, ethnic student organizations provided a vehicle for students to advocate for cultural change at the university. Third, these two elements manifested in initiatives designed to allow students to engage in acts of cultural expression by advocating for institutional change at the university. (p. 577)

Engagement in student organizations provides students with opportunities to take on positions of leadership that may not have otherwise been available.

**Rationale for the Study**

APIAs who identify as lesbian or gay face unique challenges due to their intersecting identities. The literature review revealed that there is very little understanding about this particular student population. The APIA identity-development models expose a progression in understanding the breadth of this identity. The lesbian
and gay identity development models show how race and ethnicity are not taken into consideration. However, there is advancement in better understanding individuals with multiple identities; this provides some insight on how APIA lesbian and gay students may move through college. Knowing how these identities intersect is essential to understanding the unique needs and experiences of these students. Race and sexuality influence the student perspective on campus climate and ultimately involvement on a campus. Opportunities for student involvement are filtered through the stereotypes others may have about an individual or that one may have within oneself. This study provides a glimpse into what factors affect this particular student population’s college experience.

**Summary**

The college experience is defined by whose lens filters the perspective. The developmental processes of both the APIA identity and lesbian and gay identity provide an understanding of the unique needs of each identity. However, examining the intersectionality of these identities would offer a more accurate account of what this population experiences. Determining the unique needs of this student population will allow institutions of higher education to provide better support services. Social identities influence one’s sense of campus climate and one’s perception of their sense of belonging, ultimately defining a positive versus a negative college experience.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and research design utilized for this research study. The following areas are addressed: Setting of the Study, Population and Sample, Design of the Study, Data Collection Procedures, Instrumentation, Data Analysis Procedures, Limitations of the Study, and Summary. In addition, the ethical considerations to the study are discussed.

Setting of the Study

The setting of the study was a large public university in Northern California. The student population consisted of 25,399 undergraduate students and 3,140 graduate students during fall 2012. The campus can also be considered an Asian-serving institution according to the United States federal criteria. The criteria states that Asian Americans and Pacific Islander students must constitute at least 10% of the campus’s undergraduate student. There is no system in place requiring lesbian and gay students to identify themselves. The campus’s LGBT resource center could not give an estimate of the number of LGBT students on campus or the number of students who utilized their services. Participants of the study were recruited through purposeful sampling after the researcher notified the campus’s social-identity-based offices. Interested individuals then
placed notifications of the study within their student organization’s listserv and departmental social networks.

**Research Design**

**Population and Sample**

According to Cowan (2007), a population is “a group of elements (usually subjects) that are all alike on at least one characteristic, preferably more than one” (p. 113). The population for this study was undergraduate and graduate students. Cowan (2007) defined sample as “a subject of the population that reflects the characteristics that the members of the population have in common” (p. xi). The sample for this study was students who identified as APIA and lesbian or gay. Random purposeful sampling was used to guarantee information-rich participants. Purposeful sampling is the process of identifying a population of interest and developing a systematic way of selecting cases that is not based on advanced knowledge of how the outcomes would appear. Individuals for this study who self-identified as APIA and lesbian or gay were chosen because of the insight they would be able to provide regarding the APIA lesbian and gay student experience.

**Design of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of students within higher education who identify as both APIA and lesbian or gay. As the APIA population in California continues to grow, along with an immeasurable number of lesbian and gay
students within higher education, the programs and services offered are constantly changing and adapting to the needs of students. It is critical these programs and services actually meet the needs of these students. How well the programs and services meet the needs of this student population factors into the students’ perceptions of the campus climate, which contributes to the students’ social identity development and overall experiences and interpretations of their experiences in college.

The study was conducted using a qualitative design method. The benefit of a qualitative approach is that it allowed participants to elaborate and provide specific details for each topic. The researcher developed a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) to elicit informative responses based on the experiences participants provided. In the semi-structured interviews, respondents were all asked the same questions with the opportunity for additional questions to be asked based on their initial response to further explore the research topic being addressed. All the responses were analyzed to see if themes emerged. The study consisted of interview questions separated into two sections: (a) demographic questions and (b) questions relating to the students’ experiences at their current campus.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher wanted to ensure participants were recruited through purposeful sampling. As such, the researcher used the campus’s social justice advocacy-based offices to advertise the study; the information advertising the study included the researcher’s direct contact information for interested students. Once a student contacted
the researcher, if the student fit the criteria, a one-on-one interview was scheduled in a location of the participant’s choosing. Prior to commencing the interview, the researcher provided a consent form (see Appendix B) to participate in the study. The consent form outlined the identity of the researcher, the purpose of the study, and the topics the interview questions addressed; informed participants of the level of risk and potential benefits of participating; affirmed participant anonymity and confidence; and provided contact information. Once the consent form was signed, the participants were asked demographic questions regarding their age, year in school, ethnicity, American generation, relationship status, gender, and sexual identity. American generation was defined by giving an example that first generation meant the participant was born in the United States with parents who immigrated to the United States. The following questions elicited responses regarding the participants’ experiences of the campus environment, experiences of support and senses of belonging, and the participants’ senses of activism and leadership pertaining to their APIA lesbian and gay identities.

**Instrumentation**

The researcher developed questions used for a semi-structured interview with each participant. All interview questions were open ended and consisted of eight demographic questions and nine research-focused questions. The research-focused questions were developed based on themes revealed by the literature review. The research-focused questions contained the following themes: campus climate, campus resources, campus/civic involvement, peer interactions, classroom climate, faculty
interactions, transition to campus, identity development, and satisfaction and sense of belonging.

The first eight items consisted of the demographic questions that allowed the researcher to differentiate between APIA ethnicities and lesbian-identified students and gay-identified students. Additionally, the demographic questions gave the participants the opportunity to identify how they most closely defined their American generation, which provided the researcher better context in interpreting the participants’ experiences.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

The researcher organized data according to the relevance to the research questions. Grouping related interview questions together, the researcher looked for patterns addressing the topics posed by the research questions. Using reflective analysis to interpret the data and taking into account the fact that some participants may have been asked different additional questions, the researcher formulated answers to the research questions posited.

**Limitations of the Study**

The most notable limitation encountered in the study was the difficulty in finding participants to interview. The researcher provided announcements to various departments and resources on campus; however, many of those interested were not students. The researcher initially sought six participants: three lesbian-identified students and three gay-identified students. However, the researcher was only able to find two
lesbian-identified participants but was able to find more than enough gay-identified students interested in participating. The students who met the study’s criteria were all upper-division students. Although the study was conducted anonymously, all the participants were already openly out on their campus. The study consolidated the APIA identity as well as the lesbian and gay identity into one category. As stated by Dugan and Yurman (2011), the consolidation of identities veils potential differences among the populations. The study did not look at gender or gender expression and how this may contribute to students’ perceptions of their college experiences. Because the researcher only interviewed five individuals, the findings cannot be applied to a broader population. Another limitation was that the researcher identified with both social identities.

**Ethical Considerations**

Due to the sensitivity of the study topic, the researcher had to take into account the ethical considerations of beneficence and personal bias.

**Beneficence**

The researcher was aware that the questions asked during the interview might evoke negative reactions from the participants, such as recalling a traumatic experience. The researcher ensured the comfort of the participants was a priority, and if the participants desired to stop the interview, they could voluntarily do so. The researcher considered providing the participants with support resources available on campus and in the community.
**Personal Bias**

The researcher worked at the site on which the study focused, shared the identities on which the study focused, and could have interacted with the participants outside the study. To maintain fairness and objectivity, the researcher withheld any personal bias regarding the direction of the study and the participants. The analysis of the study should accurately report information to reveal both positive and negative information and not take any interview responses out of context.

**Summary**

According to Stevens (2004), the development of social identities is most prevalent during an individual’s collegiate years. The development of students’ social identities is dependent upon their social settings, social interactions, and overall comfort in their environment (Longerbeam et al., 2007). Conducting credible research can contribute to better understanding APIA lesbian and gay students to promote continuous improvement in serving this population. To produce credible work, the researcher used a sound method of gathering information and factored ethical considerations into the study.
Chapter 4
DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the common themes that emerged from the detailed interviews conducted with students regarding their college experience at a four-year institution of higher education in the Northern California metropolitan area. The themes are organized into the following sections: social-identity challenges, connection to campus, and faculty influence.

To keep the institution and participants anonymous, the interviewees will be referred to as Interviewee 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. The names of the departmental offices and student organizations mentioned have also been altered.

Presentation of Data

Qualitative data were collected from students for the purpose of gathering narratives of students’ experiences on their campus concerning their APIA identity, sexual identity, and the intersection of these identities. Nine open-ended questions were asked to help the researcher determine what factors may affect this population’s college career. The researcher was able to use thematic analysis of each question to identify themes that emerged from the students’ responses.
**Question 1: How are you involved on this campus?**

Four of the five participants stated they were involved with at least one student organization on their campus as well as employed on campus. Interviewee 4 described the extent of their involvement on campus, “I’ve joined a professional business fraternity, I’ve joined a community service fraternity...new student orientation in various para-professional roles of higher education, academic advising, and housing....So, I have many involvements and areas of experience.” One participant’s response described their attempt to attend club meetings but never actually joined a club. Interviewee 3 said, “I try to join campus clubs, but because I’m not really somebody who participates in like just fun events...I went to multiple club meetings...but didn’t feel anything from it.” Instead, they took advantage of volunteer opportunities on their campus.

**Question 1a: Does this make you feel connected to campus?**

All participants who stated they were involved with a student organization felt connected to their campus. Interviewee 1 stated, “Once you start getting involved its – I think it like opens more windows. A lot more windows, um, in terms of opportunities, internships, scholarships – uh, networking.” For three of the five interviewees, this was a determining factor of their persistence at the institution. Interviewee 2 claimed, “If I wasn’t like a part of Greek life, I don’t think I would be, like, connected with everything and I don’t think I would like [it here] as much as I do.” The one participant who never joined a student club felt less connected through volunteerism, but strongly desired to strengthen that connection. Interviewee 3 said, “I know some of the people are busy so
it’s hard to keep that connection with them. And I felt like when I volunteered, that’s it for me....I want to, like, I guess, further develop that network or connection.”

**Question 2: What do you feel has supported your collegiate success?**

Connecting with peers and professors to build a network or support system was a prominent factor in the participants’ feelings of success. Interviewee 1 attributed their college success to “making stronger connections with the students, um, in my classes. And also, um, stepping into professors’ offices during their office hours and also just getting to know them as friends.” Two of the participants felt familial support also contributed to their collegiate success. Interviewee 5 immediately attributed their collegiate success to family, stating, “Even though they’re not here, um, and not with me 24/7, I still have – I feel like I still have their full support.” Interviewee 3 specifically described their mother as one of their primary supporters toward college success: “I would say my mother a lot, and I came from a poor family and although my mother couldn’t support me financially, she supported me emotionally.”

**Question 3: Regarding your social identities, what has been most challenging for you on this campus?**

Three of the five interviewees spoke strongly about their sexual identity regarding the ridicule and discomfort they endured and the caution they had to exercise while among other students. Interviewee 2 described their lack of acceptance within their Greek-lettered organization, claiming “gay men don’t join fraternities” and “it’s supposed to be a straight guy thing.” Interviewee 2 also described their heightened sense of
awareness of their surroundings due to their sexual orientation: “I have to be careful of my surroundings, I feel. And kind of know where I’m at and who I’m with and what I can and can’t do.” Interviewee 3 spoke about their racial identity being their greatest discomfort in any setting on campus because they were “just coming from two worlds.” Delving into more details, Interviewee 3 described their struggle connecting with other Asian Americans on campus:

I guess being discriminated a lot growing up, it kind of made me like very cautious about interacting with people. Um, being first generation, it’s also hard too, especially when I don’t hold on to traditional elements of my culture. And, I guess when I try to find common group with other Asian Americans, I don’t know if they dislike that part or if they want to acculturate more into the American culture.

Only one individual spoke of their intersecting identities being most challenging because of the lack of services supporting their specific needs. Interviewee 1 made the following statement:

I think as a queer woman of color – of color, I emphasize – it’s hard to find groups....Groups that share similar identities to me. I feel like those spaces were always separate....I think that it is important for individuals whose – who feel like they have multiple and intersecting identities to find those spaces where their multiple and intersecting identities are addressed.
Question 4: Regarding your social identities, describe your experience in a classroom setting on this campus.

All the participants felt their professors, for any class, played a critical role in whether they felt comfortable about their identities. Interviewee 1 claimed professors were “teaching it from their background,” implying their difference from, and lack of understanding of, an APIA lesbian and gay background. Interviewee 1 went on to describe the various levels of oppression or discrimination one may experience:

I would say a lot happens. And a lot, I mean not just like in your face….People being aggressive because they assume your identity, but also like microaggressions. Um, and that, um, happens in the case of students and that also happens with teachers.

Participants expressed they were most cautious about their sexual identity. Interviewee 2 explained, “As I’ve gotten older and further in college, I don’t really care as much, but I’m still very cautious of, like, what I say.” No student felt completely comfortable coming out in a classroom setting. The students determined inviting factors based on the language use or actions of the faculty members. Interviewee 4 revealed, “It’s interesting too, because there are some faculty members, especially in my graduate…programs who are noticing the gender pronouns and being more inclusive on matters such as that.”

One participant described their classroom experience primarily through their APIA identity lens; this student felt the pressure of the model-minority stereotype along
with different learning styles based on culture. Interviewee 3 stated, “Because on campus...we’re learning more like from Western academic teaching or, like, the style, like, coming from a collectivist culture to, like, one that is all about individualist, very individualistic.”

**Question 5: What privileges, if any, have you experienced identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander American and/or lesbian or gay?**

All the interviewees experienced privilege through at least one of their identities based on stereotypes. Two participants described the advantages of identifying as gay among women. Interviewee 2 explained, “Girls are not going to feel threatened and, like, not worried about you trying to sleep with them or trying to do anything with them because they know you’re gay.” Another participant spoke about their privilege identifying as lesbian and playing sports, “I guess, as a lesbian, it’s kind of like a badass when you do sports, you know.” Three participants described privileges from identifying as APIA because of model-minority stereotypes. Interviewee 1 remarked, “There’s a stereotype that you’re super smart, you’re super submissive, you’re super cute, you’re super quiet.” One participant referenced how their gender, sexual identity, and racial and ethnic identity provided a unique demographic combination advantageous for professional opportunities. Interviewee 1 mentioned, “And they will pay a lot to have lesbian, Filipino women working with them.”
Question 5a: What types of oppression, if any, have you experienced identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander American and/or lesbian or gay?

Three of the five participants felt their APIA identity brought experiences of oppression due to the same stereotypes that may be advantageous or cultural misunderstandings. Interviewee 5 claimed that “when there were confrontations, I guess, it was just misunderstandings, because we come from different cultures and things that clash.” Interviewee 1 expressed the following:

I feel like I have either missed opportunities, or felt like opportunities weren’t open to me because of the stereotypes people have, or what I thought they had, or what they openly had about me not being or being docile.

I think because of that stereotype of, like, the quiet Asian or whatever, you’re not always in the zone to be put into leadership roles. Um, and if you are…from what I’ve experienced and seen, um, it’s not like a leadership role, it’s like a supplement to the leadership role.

Two of the five participants felt their oppression experiences were due to their lesbian or gay identity. Interviewee 2 explained, “Sometimes it’s harder to get a voice because you are gay and sometimes it’s easier to have your voice heard because you are gay. Just depends on the crowd you’re in.” Interviewee 2 described an act of discrimination they experienced as a Residence Assistance that made them “feel belittled.”
Question 6: What do you feel this campus could offer to enhance your collegiate experience?

Three of the five participants were not fully aware of all the resources their campus had to offer and felt if they were more aware, they could benefit from those services. Interviewee 5 stated, “Like I said, I didn’t take advantage of a lot of the stuff that was offered on campus. I feel like if I did state something, it was probably offered and I didn’t know about it.” Two of the five participants felt being more involved with student organizations or having a support group specific to Asian Americans who identify as gay would greatly enhance their college experience. Interviewee 3 believed “it would be nice to have, like, a group...to just come together and share and understand our experience and our struggle.” Regarding support groups, Interviewee 1 stated, “I think there needs to be almost a pouring of more outreach, and I mean outreach on all levels” to raise awareness. In addition, two of the five participants felt their college experience could be enhanced if there were more Asian-focused or gay-focused events held on campus. Interviewee 2 expressed, “I know for a fact people on campus aren’t having the same experiences as I am, and I feel like the campus should hold either more bigger gay events.” One participant expressed the need for 24-hour hotlines for students, “Especially if they don’t have as much connection to the campus, or maybe they do have a huge connection to campus but they’re just afraid to say things about themselves and how they’re feeling.”
Question 6a: How do you feel Student Affairs can provide more opportunities for engagement?

Four of the five participants had some type of understanding of the role of Student Affairs at their institution. Therefore, each response was based on the participant’s definition of Student Affairs. Interviewee 5 was not sure what Student Affairs was or did, stating, “I really don’t know. I haven’t taken advantage of this office or any of the other side. I wouldn’t know how, because I don’t know exactly what you guys do.” Interviewee 2 suggested the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) resource-center table should provide more pamphlets of information since it can feel intimidating to physically go to their office. Interviewee 3 expressed their understanding that “a lot of gay tend to drop out if they don’t have that support group or if they don’t have somebody there...especially being Asian American and gay at the same time;” this calls for the need to find methods to better connect this population of students. They felt “just having, like, diversity day or, like, ethnic food day” would be a beneficial start for the APIA and lesbian and gay communities on campus. Interviewee 4 believed their Student Affairs division could engage more students through “using more incentives to motivate, um, people to really, you know, do things.” Interviewee 1 had a more elaborate idea and said, “What we really need on campus is a center for, um, a studies of gender and sexuality. Not that we don’t already have those places, but we really need to work on the research aspect of what we’re doing.” Interviewee 1 felt events on campus discussed “identity in a temporary way, where it’s a workshop for a day or maybe it’s a film
screening,” and that was not an effective way to support students’ identity development since “these are experiences that are ongoing.” Overall, the majority of participants felt a greater presence of student services and services specific to their social identities would increase engagement.

**Findings and Interpretation of Data**

**Social Identity Challenges**

When the participants were asked what challenges they faced regarding their social identities, four out of five participants spoke of their lesbian or gay identity. One participant spoke of their APIA identity. When focusing on sexual orientation, Interviewee 2 claimed, “Each place you go to, you’re coming out again,” which can pose a challenge depending on the comfort level of the individual with their identity and with those around them. Interviewee 4 stated, “I think the biggest thing is that I…might still struggle with, uh…being comfortable about, uh…my sexual orientation, my sexual identity in public.” One of the interviewees described experiencing this discomfort when they served as a resident assistant on their campus. Interviewee 4 made the following statement:

When I was walking and saw things written on the wall and one of the things, well actually there were a few, the first one was that, “Dave is gay” and “Dave sucks dick.” The thing about it, today I thought it was kind of funny, you know, why would someone want to do that, you know, to me? It took me, you know, a
few years to kind of just work through that and realize that they’re just, you know, immature and they were just…some people just don’t understand and the, you know, cheap shots like that.

Such an experience describes the impact peer discrimination had on this individual, which in turn determines this individual’s sense of comfort in being open about their sexual identity.

**Connection to Campus**

One of the prevalent themes that emerged from each interview was that each participant indicated their involvement within a student organization or connection to a student-services department had a significant impact on their college experience. Each student interviewee described involvement in different areas of campus. However, each revealed a similar connective experience as a result.

Interviewee One stated the following:

I would say that, like, the year and a half before I started really getting involved um…I really didn’t enjoy being on campus, like, it’s…it’s obvious, but when you’re not – when you don’t have a lot of friends on campus, it’s like you don’t even want to be there.

It was significant to each interviewee to make and nurture relationships with their peers. According to Interviewee 4, “I feel connected because people recognize me and there’s this mutual exchange of respect.” One of the interviewees described their experience volunteering on campus, but stated that it brought a lack of connection to campus.
However, this individual expressed a desire to build that connection, “I want to, like, I guess, further develop that network or connection with the people that I either volunteer with or work with.”

The interviewees equated connection to campus to a sense of comfort. Therefore, the campus was an environment extending beyond a strictly academic atmosphere. Interviewee 2 claimed, “My organization made me feel like this is home now.” The individual’s student organization led to peer connections and to a support system allowing them to feel comfortable and safe within that group.

**Faculty Influence**

Another prevalent theme that emerged from the interviews was the significant impact faculty members had on each of the students’ collegiate experiences. Faculty members facilitated the classroom environment, which influenced the students’ comfort levels and willingness to engage in the course. The faculty members’ use of inclusive language and sense of inclusivity was a substantial indicator of whether the students felt relatively comfortable regarding their sexual orientation. Interviewee 5 described a scenario in which their class practiced pitching products, and the faculty member asked the student group presenting whether they considered the gay community as a target audience. Interviewee 5 stated the following:

I think that even though I wasn’t comfortable to come out, it was kind of inviting. It made me feel more comfortable, even though I didn’t share that about me with the class. I felt like, you know...if I had to or if I wanted to, I could.
Two of the interviewees described experiences when they were uncertain of the classroom environment or lacked the desire to openly express their sexual orientation. Regarding faculty members, Interviewee 4 stated, “They tend to make the assumption that I’m heterosexual.” Regarding the assumptions of others, Interviewee 2 described their frustration with feeling they had to hide their identity, “I’ve said stories in class and then people are like, ‘Huh? Like, we don’t want to hear about that.’ Why can you talk about your life but I can’t talk about mine?” Interviewee 2 went so far as to change the genders of individuals when telling a personal story in class to reflect a heterosexual situation.

The students described how they felt the faculty member created either a safe or hostile classroom environment, which then impacted the student’s comfort level on campus. Interviewee 2 described their discomfort in identifying their sexual orientation in a classroom setting:

I don’t know if people were going to be offended or if people are going to follow me after class or write hate mail...or something like that. It’s scary sometimes, because you feel comfortable and in, like, our generation it’s more accepting, but there’s always going to be people that are just, like, they don’t agree. And they want to make sure you know they don’t agree.

Four of the five interviewees described the impact of a faculty member openly communicating a sense of inclusiveness. Interviewee 2 described experiencing a professor speaking positively about the gay community, “It was like a breath of fresh air,
that faculty, she’s like an older member, probably in her mid-50s, and she’s just like...she was so positive about the gay community. And it’s just, like...it makes me feel comfortable.”

Only one of the interviewees described their classroom experience framed in their lesbian or gay identity as well as their APIA identity. Referring to classroom discussions, Interviewee 3 stated, “I felt like none of my experiences that was my own struggle is even being discussed.” Interviewee 3 also described the pedagogical difference they experienced, “Being Asian and just coming from a totally different culture, ideology, philosophy and...the ideology and philosophy that we’re taught to just be quiet and just sit there and listen, you know, and go along with whatever.”

**Summary**

Chapter 4 presented the findings resulting from the personal interviews with each of the five research participants, all of whom were currently enrolled students at a four-year institution of higher education. The narratives, told in their own words, reflect the personal experiences of these students while attending their university. The participants all had different backgrounds, with the exception of two shared social identities, that affected their college experience. The prevalent themes emerging from these stories illustrate the challenges students experience regarding their racial and sexual identity, the effect of having a connection to campus, and the significant influence faculty members
have on campus climate. In the following chapter, the study summary, conclusions, and recommendations are presented in the context of the field of higher education.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the conclusions from this study. It includes results and interpretations of the factors affecting APIA students who identify as lesbian or gay. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research and recommendations regarding this student population in the field of higher education.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of APIA students who identify as lesbian or gay to determine factors affecting their collegiate career. The researcher recruited participants through purposeful sampling to conduct five semi-structured interviews to gather narratives about this population. The questions revolved around the themes of campus climate, campus resources, campus/civic involvement, peer interactions, classroom climate, faculty interactions, transition to campus, identity development, and satisfaction and sense of belonging. Based on the responses, the three prominent themes that emerged were social identity challenges, connection to campus, and faculty influence.

The participants described the challenges they faced regarding their APIA and/or lesbian or gay identity. Three of the five students felt they experienced discrimination or
discomfort based on their sexual orientation. Two of the five students felt they experienced discrimination or learning challenges based on their racial identity.

Another finding was the number of participants involved in at least one student organization and the significant impact their organization had in their sense of belonging. Many of the participants explicitly stated they would not have continued at their institution had they not joined a club with which they connected. One of the most prevalent findings was the weight of influence faculty members had on a student’s learning, comfort level, and overall college experience; in addition, faculty members’ were a significant inspiration as role models.

**Conclusions**

Findings from the study allowed the researcher to better understand the unique experiences of students identifying as both APIA and lesbian or gay. It was apparent that student organizations were significant in making the students feel connected to campus and ultimately wishing to persist with their higher education. The participants also explicated the influence faculty members had on their collegiate experience. Faculty members’ expressing a sense of inclusivity and acceptance of historically oppressed identities attributed to APIA lesbian and gay students feeling comfortable or safe within the classroom environment and general campus environment. Participants experienced such feeling through faculty members’ inclusive language and educational consideration
of the students’ social identities. All these factors affect the perception of one’s college experience.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

In acknowledging the narrowness of this study, many variations of this study can be completed to further expand the understanding of this population. The researcher offers the following recommendations:

- Creating a study that spans the course of the students’ college careers would provide a greater range of insight and details of this population’s experience.

- Since this study looked at both lesbian and gay identities, creating a study to look more closely at gender would provide a better understanding of the students’ perceptions of their experiences. Gender plays a role in an individual’s cognitive development, leadership development, and overall social-identity development since there may be different types of oppression.

- Bisexual identity is often oppressed by both the heterosexual and gay communities (Dugan & Yurman, 2011). Examining the bisexual APIA college experience would provide insight for this unique identity.

- A study considering the different ethnic identities would capture a better sense of the students’ experiences since each ethnic identity has their own unique culture, values, and beliefs.
• A study in which the focus included academic achievement would be significant for understanding how this factor may correlate to students’ on-campus social activities.

• As revealed in the study, faculty members hold a great amount of influence in the classroom. Their use of language and sense of inclusiveness determines the comfort level for students regarding both their racial and sexual identities. A study in which faculty members attend a training workshop would be beneficial for this student population.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for a Study of Asian/Pacific Islander American Students Who Identify as Lesbian or Gay

**Researcher:** Mai Nguyen, Graduate Student at California State University, Sacramento.

**Purpose:** To analyze the experiences of Asian/Pacific Islander American students who identify as lesbian or gay to determine factors that may affect their collegiate career.

**Questions:**

**Demographic Questions**
1. Where are you from?
2. How old are you?
3. What year in school are you in? or How long have you been at Sacramento State?
4. What is your ethnicity?
5. With which American generation do you most identify (1\textsuperscript{st}, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, etc., generation)? (American generation will be defined as: 1\textsuperscript{st} generation = first born in the U.S. with parents who immigrated to the U.S.)
6. What is your relationship status?
7. With what gender do you most closely identify?
8. With what sexual identity do you most closely identify?

**Research-focused Questions**

- **Themes found in literature:**
  - Campus climate
  - Campus resources
  - Campus/civic involvement
  - Peer interactions
  - Classroom climate
  - Faculty interactions
  - Transition to campus
  - Identity development
  - Satisfaction and sense of belonging

1. How are you involved on this campus? [Campus Involvement/Peer Interactions]
   a. Does this make you feel connected to campus? [Sense of Belonging]

2. What do you feel has supported your collegiate success? [Campus Climate/Sense of Belonging/Campus Resources]
3. With regards to your social identities, what has been most challenging for you on this campus? [Identity Development]

4. With regards to your social identities, describe your experience in a classroom setting on this campus? [Campus (Classroom) Climate/Faculty Interactions]

5. What privileges, if any, have you experienced identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander American and/or lesbian or gay? [Identity Development]
   a. What types of oppression, if any, have you experienced identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander American and/or lesbian or gay? [Identity Development]

6. What do you feel this campus could offer to enhance your collegiate experience? [Campus Climate/Campus Resources/Transition to Campus/Campus Involvement/Sense of Belonging]
   a. How do you feel Student Affairs can provide more opportunities for engagement? [Campus Climate/Campus Resources/Sense of Belonging/Campus Involvement]
APPENDIX B

Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in research which will be conducted by Mai Nguyen, a graduate student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at California State University, Sacramento. The purpose of this study is to analyze the experiences of Asian/Pacific Islander American students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual to determine factors that may affect this population’s collegiate career.

You will be asked to participate in an interview with the researcher, providing information regarding your social identities, transition to campus, perception of the campus climate and campus resources, your campus involvement, your relationship with other students and faculty, and overall satisfaction and sense of belonging to the campus community. The interview questions may require up to two hours of your time. Depending on the outcome of the analysis of your responses, you may be contacted and asked to participate in a follow-up interview.

Some of the items in the interview may seem personal, but you do not have to answer any question if you do not want to. A list of campus and community resources will be provided prior to the start of the interview for your convenience.

You may gain additional insight into factors that affect success in college, or you may not personally benefit from participating in this research. It is hoped that the results of the study will be beneficial for further research topics for programs and services designed to encourage students to remain in college.

Your participation and responses collected during the interview in this study will remain confidential. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped. Those tapes will be destroyed as soon as the interview has been transcribed. The transcriptions will be destroyed upon completion of the research study. Until that time, they will be stored in a secure locked office. All data collected will be reported anonymously and in thematic summary form.

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

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact Mai Nguyen at (214) XXX-XXXX or by e-mail at xxxxxxxx@csus.edu or the researcher’s faculty advisor Dr. Francisco Reveles at xxxxxxxx@csus.edu.
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to decide at a later time to stop participating. The researcher may also end your participation at any time. Your signature below indicates you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

___________________________  _______________________
Signature of Participant       Date
REFERENCES


