



## **White Paper Fall 2012**

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The KC produces white papers, which are compilations of current and cutting-edge research summaries and briefs. The goal of the white paper is to share knowledge and information about issues related to the status of the GLBT community in higher education that will prompt discussion, further research and showcase scholarship being conducted by students and professionals in the field. Higher education and student affairs professionals can consider these recent findings/results when tailoring programmatic and pedagogical efforts on their campus. All scholars, researchers and professionals are welcome to submit summaries or briefs about their scholarship to the whitepaper; membership in NASPA is not a prerequisite. For more information about the submission guidelines, contact the KC leadership at [glbtkc@gmail.com](mailto:glbtkc@gmail.com)

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# Horizontal Oppression Among East Asian Gay/Bisexual Men

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Historical media and academic literature in the U.S. portray a negative disparaging image of East Asians. There is even more ridicule for East Asians who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer. This literature review reveals some ways that colonization and globalization create and feed horizontal oppression among gay and bisexual East Asian American men.

Only a limited amount of empirical research and literature focuses on racial horizontal oppression within the queer community. A thorough review requires an interdisciplinary approach, including sources from inside and outside of higher education. To deconstruct queer horizontal oppression, I reviewed literature focused on masculinity, gender roles, dating, mass media, anti-Asian sentiments, and diaspora.

## Anti-Asian Sentiments

There are many attitudes towards various racial groups, especially those that do not hold a White dominant identity. Often negative, these attitudes are rampant in modern day United States. Racism is not new, but has a long and rich history in its subtle and overt forms, that many try to forget.

Stereotypes of femininity, docility, and exoticness (Erbenraut, 2010c) are perpetuated by mass media. The East Asian stereotypes of docility and femininity allow negative sentiments against this group to continue to be condoned in the gay community (Erbenraut, 2010a). Anti-Asian prejudice, along with anti-fat and anti-aging, is among the dominant forms of oppression found within gay male culture. There is a common dating exclusionary triad: no fatties, no femmes, no Asians (Erbenraut, 2010c). These prejudices are epidemic in the wider community of gay White urban American affluent men (Erbenraut, 2010a).

## Asians in Media

In-group racial horizontal oppression can be traced to the assimilation, acculturation, and homophobia, which has long been institutionalized into the fabric of U.S. society. The homophobia of heterosexual Asian men towards queer Asian men is largely responsible for the systematic and horizontal oppression of queer Asian men toward one another (Erbenraut, 2010a; 2010b, 2010c). Because all Asian men are portrayed as effeminate, queer Asian men further perpetuate this stereotype. A well-known and controversial example of this was the 2004 spread in *Details Magazine: Gay or Asian?* The piece showcased an Asian male who presented an ambiguous sexuality. *Details* included commentary on his stance, fashion sense, accessories, and how well-kept he was. Although the spread was meant to be a satire, it caused uproar in the Asian community and illustrates why heterosexual Asian men blame queer Asian men for negative stereotypes about their cultural group (Erbenraut, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c). Even today, the media reinforces as well as perpetuates Asian stereotypes.

## Gay Asian and Diaspora

In his research of Filipino gay men, Manalansan (2003) discussed how Filipino men have to negotiate between Filipino and American sexual and gender traditions; more specifically, between *bakala* and Western gay ideologies. *Bakala* is a Tagalog term that encompasses homosexuality,

hermaphroditism, cross-dressing, and effeminacy (Manalansan, 2003). Although the Philippines is not a part of the East Asia region, it is the best example I could find that mirrored the lack of language used in East Asian cultures for the nuances of gay sexuality. In my experience of speaking three dialects of Chinese, there is a lack of formal gay vernacular used in sexual and gender depictions. The lack of formal language and written history concerning gay sexualities can be attributed to the lack colonial history in East Asia. This history may also contribute to the lack of research on men who both identify as East Asian and Queer.

As Global Queering finds its way into the gay Asian Diaspora (Altman, 1993) due to the overwhelming influence of the U.S. as a global economic, political and cultural superpower (Altman, 1997; Gawthrop, 2004), queer Asian Americans find themselves dating more White- Anglos (Gawthrop, 2004). Altman (1995) attributed these relationships to two contradicting factors: the need to assert a universal gay identity invoking similarities with queer Westerners and, on the other hand, the proud embrace of a newly asserted “Asian-ness” that could potentially undermine an “assume solidarity” with gay White-Anglos. These trends show traces of horizontal oppression that can also be tied to assimilation and acculturation.

### Conclusion

Identities are often too generalized and universalized. Manalansan (1997) asked a great question of who bestows legitimacy in the narration of gay and lesbian development. Available literature, research and even LGB identity development model and theories show that this legitimacy is centered around a monolithic association of gay identity with white gay masculinity. I hope through this review, I was able to change this monolithic association by focusing on various forms of horizontal oppression.

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# The Commodification of Identity: The Job Search Experiences of LGBT Student Affairs Professionals

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Empirical understandings of the experiences of LGBT-identified student affairs professionals have developed very little in past 15 years. This lack of attention is unfortunate because campus climates around issues of sexual diversity have changed considerably during that time (Rankin, 2007; Rankin & Weber, 2010). At the same time, issues of newer professionals, as the future leaders of the field of student affairs, are becoming an ever more important part of the literature landscape. It will be important to understand the intersection of these two research themes in order to ensure that student affairs remains an inclusive and supportive profession for LGBT-identified individuals, and through them, the students and institutions they serve.

The landscape of higher education has changed dramatically for the LGBT community over the 15 years. Most of the research attention has been paid to students, leaving the experiences of LGBT student affairs professionals largely undocumented. The need for a greater understanding is acute, as Rankin (2007) noted, “much of the academic writing on LGBT people is not empirical, but takes the form of advice or personal reflections”. Croteau and Talbot (2000) provided an inherently brief review of the “minimal research” that “has been conducted examining the student affairs profession itself”.

In taking up the call for more research into the experiences of sexual minority practitioners, it may be helpful to focus on that crucial transition from graduate preparation program and into the field. Examining that nexus can provide insight into both how academic programs are addressing issues of LGBT inclusion as well as the attitudes of graduates of the programs. To that end, a qualitative exploration of the job experiences of LGBT student affairs professionals who had recently completed a graduate preparation program was undertaken.

## *Purpose*

This study aims to illuminate the job search experiences of LGBT-identified graduates of higher education and student affairs master’s degree programs. While there is a growing body of research on the LGBT student experience (Rankin, 2007; Rankin & Weber, 2010; Wall & Evans, 2000), the perspectives of LGBT student affairs professionals have been almost completely absent. The dramatic changes in American society and on campus in regard to the LGBT community call for an update to the empirical literature related to LGBT student affairs professionals.

Given the dearth of literature on experiences of LGBT-identified student affairs professionals, particularly those transitioning from graduate preparation programs into the workforce, it is important to better understand several aspects of the experience. In order to do so, this study used semi-structured interviews to answer the following primary research questions: 1) how do LGBT job seekers understand and make meaning on their sexual identity as part of their job search experience, and 2) how do LGBT job seekers perceive the student affairs job market into which they are entering.

Such an approach is in contrast to the most similar previous research effort in which the qualitative aspect was limited to incidents of discrimination (Croteau & von Destinon, 1994), failing to address

the experience holistically. Since the great majority of the relevant literature is either non-empirical or quantitative in nature (Lark, 1998; Rankin, 2007), approaching these questions in a qualitative manner will be a substantive contribution to the literature.

### *Conceptual Framework*

This study used an exploratory, qualitative approach based on the *Listening Guide* method of interview and analysis (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003) and adapted by Way (Way, 2011a, 2011b). This approach “draws on voice, resonance and relationship as ports of entry into the human psyche” (Gilligan et al., 2003, p. 157), meaning that through the interview and analysis process, it is possible to understand the worldview of others come to understand how they interact with and make meaning of their social environments. Finding its basis in relational psychology, the researcher comes to find answers in relationship with interview participants via an in-depth engagement with their voice as expressed through the artifacts of the interview.

### *Description of Method*

The sample consisted of 17 LGBT-identified individuals who had completed a master’s degree in higher education or student affairs and participated in a job search within the past 18 months. All participants were asked explicitly how they self-identified as part of the LGBT community. The group included 11 gay men, two lesbian women, one genderqueer individual, one female-to-male transgender man, one bisexual woman and one queer woman. While mostly white, four participants identified as latino, one as Asian American and one as biracial (white and Mexican).

The interview protocol was revised twice throughout the data collection period based on emergent areas of relevance. Specifically, questions were added related to individuals and institutions from which LGBT job seekers sought information and social support as well as expanding the demographic questions to include religion. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The adaptation of the *Listening Guide* method used in this study involved a series of successive readings of the interview transcriptions. The first reading involved summarizing the ‘story’ of the interview, highlighting passages of the narrative that were important to the participant as well as the researchers reactions to what was said. The second reading is a close review of the transcription, looking for surprising, contradictory or superficial responses in order to better identify the most meaningful text. The third reading was to identify ‘I-poems’ – sequential renderings of the participants’ first-person statements – which linguistically represent the participants’ perspective and voice.

### *Initial Findings*

Participants engaged in a variety of strategies around disclosure of their LGBT identity during their job search, depending on how they perceived not only the institutions to which they were applying, but also the field as a whole. As one white, gay male participant noted, being LGBT is “sort of an accepted norm in our field.” A white, female lesbian participant offered a similar opinion about how the field prioritizes the LGBT community, saying

“I think, at least in student affairs, there is a lot less understanding of disability than there is of LGBT” issues. “...I felt more accepted when I came out being gay a lot of time than when I came out as someone with a disability even though I did the disability thing more often.”

Another white, gay male participant voiced a parody of this norm, saying, “Everybody’s gay in residence life, so why not out myself and I can be part of the club.”

For some participants, that receptivity to LGBT candidates was affirmed. A white, gay male participant made it a point to discuss his graduate experiences working with LGBT students with the intention that potential employers assume that he was also a member of the community. For him, “It seemed like they [the interviewers] might have thought that I was gay and were trying to reassure me that the school was an accepting school, that it would be a good place to work.” Another white, gay male said, “Obviously they can’t openly discriminate against you and say ‘Well, we’re not going to hire you because you’re gay,’ but you don’t know what goes on behind closed doors.” Despite anxiety about possible discrimination, the participants had developed an understanding of the student affairs job market as one in which blatant acts of homophobia would not be allowed.

Others felt that being out during the job search process was not a matter of choice. For instance, the genderqueer individual was struggling with the practical logistics of interviewing when gender expression may not coincide with biology. This participant recalled, “For over six months, probably a year, I was debating what I was going to wear” because the professional dress expected in student affairs interviews is divided by the male/female gender binary.

Despite concerns about possible negative reactions, many participants were intentionally forthcoming about their LGBT identity in order to assess the probability of being comfortably out in a potential workplace. As one white, gay male participant said, “If that [being out in the interview] made me less likely to get the job, then I probably don’t want the job anyway.” Another white, gay male concurred that it was important to be out during the interview, saying, “I would rather just get it out of way to begin with than have to fight that battle later on.” However, others were more circumspect about their identity in interviews, with one white, gay male participating recalling his possible discomfiting coming out in the interview, while at the same time saying, “I don’t remember a reason for it to come up.”

For those participants who were out during their job search, this perception of openness around LGBT issues created an opportunity to not only manage their identity, but use it to strategic advantage. Several participants included work they had done with LGBT students on their application materials, whether or not they intended to come out during an interview, so that, as one Asian American, gay male noted, potential employers would “know I am an advocate of LGBT issues and students.” Similarly, a white, female lesbian felt that her resume “definitely showed that I was working with and in the community.” The perceived desirability of social justice advocates becomes one way for LGBT job seekers to leverage their connection to a minority community without necessarily disclosing their own identity. The participant who likened residence life to being a club for gays jokingly suggested that “maybe an employer would want me more” if he came out during the interview, with his sexual identity being a condition of membership.

Being able to identify as a member of or ally to diverse groups was understood to be of value to potential employers. One gay, Latino male participant recalled that several of the job descriptions he reviewed “sought out individuals who identified as diverse.” He went on to say that “particularly in student affairs, identifying or being out is valued,” citing one potential employer that was specifically looking for “individuals who identify with multiple dimensions of identity.” Similarly, a white, lesbian participant noted that the women’s center in which she worked, “being gay was something that’s like almost a positive in your stack, in your bucket,” as one of multiple minority identities she held because “they want to have a diverse person.” A white, gay male participant recalled that several potential employers showed an interest in his previous research work about the LGBT community “as a way of diversifying their own universities.” That perceived valuation of diverse

identities creates an environment in which being able to align oneself with one or more dimension of diversity would be a boon to job seekers.

LGBT identity and its disclosure then becomes something job seekers use to benefit their candidacy. One white, gay male participant, who had not yet been offered an interview, anticipated, “If I can use a personal example from my life that would be... a good answer, I would definitely choose to do that.” This participant’s response indicates how LGBT identity disclosure becomes a part of the currency of exchange in the student affairs job market, in which candidates can disclose part of their own identity to demonstrate value that they may bring to department or institution.

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# Beyond the Binary:

## A Phenomenological Study of the Campus Experiences and Social Identities of Bisexual, Pansexual, Fluid, and Queer Students at a Public University

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### **Description:**

The emergence and use of fluid sexual identity labels by college students is vital to our understanding of students’ conceptualization of their own sexual identity and helps to contextualize their experiences. Students’ perceived stereotypes, social group identification, and the implications for campus climate are important in informing the work of student and academic affairs professionals in serving this student population. Campus climate experiences are largely influenced by social forces reinforcing acceptable or appropriate sexual identities. Through the sharing of their experiences within the postsecondary environment, we are able to increase our awareness of their otherwise invisible stories.

This study explored the untold stories central to bisexual, pansexual, fluid, and queer (BPFQ) sexual identities at a large public university in the Western United States through the lens of the social identity perspective. This perspective focuses on the perceptions BPFQ students have of their own identities and the contextual information influencing behavior and identification in order to reinforce in-group and out-group membership. The social identity perspective provides a useful lens in which to understand the factors influencing and shaping their experiences on college campuses. This study aimed to capture the experiences of members of these social groups and explore the social world in which they make meaning of their identities. Additionally, this study had the goal of reconceptualizing these communities as BPFQ in order to capture the shared experiences of those historically labeled bisexual and to bring visibility to the heterogeneity of experiences within this group.

This study examined the campus experiences, social identity labels, and campus support for BPFQ students at Western University. From the seven students’ stories, 11 themes emerged pertaining to the experiences of BPFQ students at Western. The themes were 1) transition to college, 2) first year residential experience, 3) fear of initially accessing the LGBTQRC, 4) perception of campus climate and safety, 5) campus involvement opportunities, 6) resistance to labels, 7) language politics, 8) exposure to stereotypes, 9) internal versus social group identities, 10) factors determining access to support, and 11) queer people of color spaces. Implications for campus climate and recommendations for practice are provided, as well as four areas for further research.

# Family Acceptance, Internalized Sexual Stigma and Substance Abuse in Sexual Minority Males

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Sexual minority individuals often experience various types of victimization associated with negative health outcomes. While research regarding issues related to sexual minorities has been mixed, it identifies the stressors associated with an individual's sexual minority status. Research has found that sexual minority males experience significant challenges with regards to their sexual orientation, putting them at higher risk for issues related to family acceptance, difficulties in coping with the result of disclosing their sexual orientation to others, and negative health outcomes, such as substance abuse. This research study utilized the Minority Stress Model (MSM), which has been applied to racial/ethnic minority and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) populations, in addressing stress as an external event for those unable to successfully cope. However, the MSM fails to address the issue of perceived family acceptance (PFA), which was found to play an important role in coming to terms with one's sexual orientation and on an individual's ability to cope with stress related to their sexual minority status. This research study investigated the relationship between perceived family acceptance, internalized sexual stigma (ISS), and substance abuse (SA) in a sample of 151 gay and 26 bisexual men 18-25.

The current study indicated that in the presence of PFA, ISS and SA in sexual minorities were reduced. In a series of OLS regressions, the three variables (PFA, ISS and SA) were analyzed and perceived family acceptance was found to have a significant relationship to substance abuse in gay men,  $F(1, 149) = 9.19, p = .003$  and bisexual men  $F(1, 23) = 5.99, p = .022$ . However, a fourth regression showed that internalized sexual stigma was no longer a significant predictor of substance abuse,  $B = -0.003, p = .110$  in the presence of perceived family acceptance supporting the mediation in this sample; while no significant mediation effect could be found in the sample of bisexual males. These findings suggest the need for further research of whether family acceptance mediates the relationship between internalized sexual stigma and substance abuse in this population.

The Minority Stress Model (MSM) which proposes that stigma, prejudice, and discrimination contribute to psychological stress that can lead to negative health outcomes (Meyer, 2003), also presents support for the inclusion of perceived family acceptance and internalized sexual stigma as chronic stressors in a sexual minority's life (Meyer, 1995, 2003; Kelleher, 2009). It is due to these chronic stressors that negative attitudes and non-acceptance of minority groups have been seen to have an effect on the health outcomes of individuals (Mustanski, Garofalo & Emerson, 2010).

The results of this study are both interesting and intriguing. The results of the bivariate correlations were found to be contrary to the initial hypothesis, but provide support for mediation in the sample of gay males. The bivariate correlations for gay males show a negative correlation between internalized sexual stigma and substance abuse ( $r = -.19, p = .020$ ), suggesting that as internalized sexual stigma increased, substance abuse tended to decrease. The data suggests that an individual with increased ISS will have a decrease in substance abuse; this could be due to the fact that sexual minority individuals may already have negative beliefs toward themselves (Herek, 2009) and therefore using various substances to cope with the stress that comes with being identified as a sexual minority was not necessary because they were masking the pain with substances. Another plausible explanation

for this finding may be that since the sample population was affiliated with LGBT organizations, ISS could still contribute to the stress of the sexual minority individual; however, the involvement with the LGBT organization could reduce the need to self-medicate to cope, due to the ability to interact with others dealing with stress associated with their sexual identity (Amadio & Chung, 2004).

The bisexual participants had a similar correlation coefficient and direction as the gay participants showing an insignificant negative correlation between internalized sexual stigma and substance abuse ( $r = -.31, p = .119$ ). The findings here suggest that further research in the area of bisexuality is needed to better understand the effects on a bisexual individual's well-being. Research has shown that bisexual individuals often report lower levels of perceived support and tend to hide their sexual identity from others (Sheets & Mohr, 2009), which lends to the low sample size collected for the current study.

Although internalized sexual stigma, if operating below consciousness, has been found to affect health in ways that differ from the current study (Williamson, 2000), the findings are important to understand that there may be other stressors, other than ISS, that contribute to substance abuse. Further research needs to focus on refining the concept and measures of ISS and improving ways in addressing how this concept is used with LGBT individuals.

Further analysis of the research found a significant positive correlation between internalized sexual stigma and perceived family acceptance for both gay ( $r = .28, p = .001$ ) and bisexual ( $r = .69, p < .001$ ) participants, suggesting that as internalized sexual stigma increased, perceived family acceptance also tended to increase. A possible explanation for this is that an LGBT individual may identify with a "family of choice" (Cahill, Ellen and Tobias, 2002) when they are rejected by their families of origin because of their sexual orientation. A family of choice is accepting of the individual, which would increase PFA, while at the same time increase ISS because of the rejection they have encountered with their family of origin, as identified in the current study as the individual's parents.

This study finds that there was a significant negative correlation between perceived family acceptance and substance abuse for both gay ( $r = -.24, p = .003$ ) and bisexual ( $r = -.46, p = .022$ ) participants, suggesting that as perceived family acceptance increased, substance abuse tended to decrease. The correlation provides support that regardless of sexual identity, if gay and bisexual individuals perceive family acceptance, an individual is able address the stressors associated with identifying as a sexual minority and do not need to turn to substances to cope. This is in line with previous research that suggests disclosure to parents has been associated with reduced alcohol abuse (Stall et al., 2001) and supports the hypothesis presented in the current study.

Although previous research provides that social support was found to be a mediator (Kertzner, Meyer, Frost, & Stirratt, 2009) and moderator (Spencer & Patrick, 2009) in the relationship between sexual stigma and an individual's well-being, the current study provides support for including perceived family acceptance as a mediator to negative health outcomes of sexual minority individuals, such as ISS and SA.

The findings of this study should demonstrate that perceived family acceptance mediates the relationship between internalized sexual stigma and substance abuse among gay males 18-25; while perceived family acceptance mediates the relationship between internalized sexual stigma and substance abuse among bisexual males 18-25 was not supported. It is still unknown if the result

would differ for bisexual participants if there was a larger sample size. The results from this study will contribute to the understanding of the impact rejecting reactions to sexual orientation and gender expression has on LGBT health. In addition, it will provide guidance to professionals working with LGBT populations in the development of effective services for LGBT individuals and understand why individuals from socially stigmatized groups might not respond favorably to conventional treatment or leave treatment prematurely.

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# Out in Admissions:

## Creating Positive Campus Climates Through Inclusive Admissions Practices

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Historically underrepresented student enrollment in U. S. higher education grew more than 100% at both two- and four-year institutions between 1981 and 2001. To best support this change many higher education institutions have strategically planned to create inclusive campus communities (Komives & Woodard Jr., 2003). Higher education institutions have the difficult task of diversifying the types of “minoritized” students that are welcomed onto campus. Students are entering higher education with a deeper sense of self and identity. Students’ identity development most often happens during their undergraduate experience (Komives & Woodard, Jr.); however, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning and intersex identified students are entering higher education with a better understanding and awareness of their identity (Denizet-Lewis, 2009). It is important that student affairs educators take steps that are proactive in creating an inclusive climate for these students.

The findings of an exploratory qualitative study of pansexual, queer, and gender queer identified student’s transitions to higher education are summarized in this article. A grounded theory approach was employed. Two prominent themes emerged from the data analysis: 1) conscious awareness of identity development; and 2) positive experiences with transition to college and campus climate.

Five full-time traditional-aged undergraduate students consented to participate in the study. Participants included three queer students, one genderqueer/pansexual student, and one female/pansexual student. To further protect the participants anonymity pseudonyms were assigned. Each participant was out prior to enrolling at MSU. Participants included one first year student, one sophomore, two juniors, and one senior. Protocol questions asked participants about their experiences during the admissions process and their transitions to higher education. Questions and prompts included: To what degree are you out on campus? To what degree did you incorporate your LGBTQQI identity in your college search and application process? As a student who identifies within the LGBTQQI community, what is your experiences on campus with residential housing, campus programming, and in the classroom.

### Findings

#### Theme 1: Conscious Awareness Identity Development

The first theme to emerge was “a level of conscious awareness” among the participants in regards to their identity development and needs during the college search process. Participants understood the queer identities that they held during their college search which prompted them to consider and integrate their identities to varying degrees. Kaden spoke about gender identity or sexuality within the college search/application process, “I grew up in a small town so I wanted to go to a college that was really affirming... every college that I applied to had to be queer-friendly in some way, whether they had LGBT centers or clubs, MSU had the most prominent one.”

#### Theme 2: Positive Campus Climate

The second theme to emerge was the participants experienced a positive campus climate. Examples of MSU's inclusive climate included their experiences with classroom experiences, housing options, and campus programming.

Participants had positive experiences in the classroom. They shared how professors integrated queer issues into the curriculum and were sensitive to LGBTQQI issues. Jayce said: I officially changed my preferred name and pronoun on campus which I used for all of my classes and I had a professor that with whom I had a class earlier when I had a different pronoun and name; that professor was able to make the switch seamlessly and even said a few words to me to give me their support. This was really great.

### *Housing*

Most participants live or had lived within LGBTQQI theme housing and described it as an important part of their MSU experience. Kaden spoke to their experiences within the residence hall: For the past two years I've lived in a program in a living and learning community called Blurred-Lines and it has been super queer-friendly and the majority of the people I live with are queer, so it's a nice little safe house. It's nice to be able to hang out and talk. It's home.

### *Programming and Campus Events*

Programming and events on campus served as an integral part of each participant's campus experience. Though mostly involved with LGBTQQI specific campus events, participants considered the campus-wide programming inclusive.

Jamie, a pansexual identified senior education major described her participation in the first-year orientation program, "Orientation really re-affirmed why I came to MSU. My orientation leader identified as queer and the keynote speaker spoke about queer issues...we talked for an hour about the spectrum of sexuality and gender identity

## **Discussion**

The findings from this study diverge from previous studies (Campus Pride, 2010; Rankin, 2003) on campus climate assessments. Findings from this study revealed the participants had mostly positive experiences at MSU, including inclusive programming, classroom experiences which diverged from both the Rankin (2003) student as well as the Campus Pride (2010) study. Because of MSU's inclusive institutional policies, curricular and co-curricular programming, and housing options, participants' experiences and perceptions of campus climate were affirming.

Astin's 1984 theory of involvement, which refers to the "amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 31) states the more a student is involved in their collegiate experience, the more successful they will become (as cited in Evans et al., 2010). The Rankin study (2010) discussed the importance of LGBTQQI student involvement on campus and that it directly correlates to positive identity development. There are several ways that students can become involved in their campus community. These suggested best practices include: theme and gender-neutral housing options, inclusive institutional policies and commitment, and curricular and co-curricular education, which are all available at MSU. The aforementioned initiatives not only increase visibility on campus but also provide for recognition, affirmation, and treatment of LGBTQQI identified people. When students are more aware of the inclusive nature of an institution, they are more likely to attend that institution (Einhaus, Viento, & Croteau, 2004).

While marketing and the institution's admissions office plays a pivotal role in outreach to students, cultural capital assists students in determining if an institution's climate is inclusive (Einhaus et al.).

### **Conclusion**

As students navigate the college search process and enroll in college with a greater awareness of the identities they possess, they will inherently have a greater awareness of what to look for during that search. LGBTQQI visibility is growing in both positive and negative ways within high schools throughout the nation (Einhaus et al., 2004). Despite the increased presence of gay-straight alliances in U. S. high schools, recent suicides within the LGBTQQI community provide opportunities for advocates to advance awareness and create an inclusive paradigm shift among all student populations (Einhaus, et al.).

Student affairs practitioners are responsible for creating inclusive practices on campus as well as assessing the needs of incoming students. All student populations are continuously growing and changing due to social awareness, societal influence, and generational trends (Komives & Woodard, Jr., 2003). Student development models and theories should be utilized to help practitioners engage students in meaningful conversations around the hetero-normativity and sexism that exists within higher education institutions. While it is important to acknowledge initiatives that make campus climates more inclusive, student affairs professionals must understand that significant work remains to ensure campus environments are inclusive.

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# Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Student Experiences of Sexual Violence

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## **Purpose:**

To investigate the rape and sexual assault experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer students in Boston-area higher education institutions.

## **Study sample:**

186 self-identified LGBTQ current and former students of Boston area higher education institutions

## **Methods:**

Online questionnaire with opportunities for telephone interviews and narrative submissions.

## **Quantitative results:**

*Results by Demographic Information.*

- Average age = 22.6 years
- 69% middle to upper-middle class
- 72% White/Caucasian
- Freshman and seniors were two largest reporting groups

*Results by Sexual Violence Information.*

- 48% experienced unwanted sexual contact while in college
- 1 out of 23 experienced at least one rape
- 1 out of 5 experienced at least one sexual assault
- 28% felt their gender identity and/or sexual orientation was a factor in their rape or sexual assault
- 40% stated their academic performance suffered as a result of their rape or sexual assault
- 13% of those who experienced a sexual assault were students of color
- Boyfriends and fellow-student acquaintances were largest perpetrators of rape
- Friends and strangers were largest perpetrators of sexual assault

## **Qualitative responses:**

Given the still-tempestuous political and social nature of LGBTQ rights issues both on and off campus, I began the Boston study in 2011 expecting students to respond that they were fearful of reporting their assaults due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, which made them less than ideal victims and could provoke negative, prejudicial, and discriminatory responses from officials. Instead, students repeatedly described a wide number of internalized rape myths in support of their decision to not report. Respondents answered that they were “ashamed and confused” and “[didn’t want] to look weak” as a result of their rape or sexual assault (Respondent #58, #85). The feelings of shame, guilt, and weakness that often accompany survivors of sexual violence reflect long-standing notions of victim responsibility for rape and sexual assault. Such notions directly

impact the willingness of survivors to report their assaults, as indicated by respondent #189's assertion that they "felt ... at fault at the time" of their sexual assault. Respondent #234 stated that they learned to "not put myself in compromising situations." Respondent #175 takes this notion one step further, stating, "It occurred in a setting where physical contact is frequent, most people are intoxicated and therefore sexual assault can be expected to occur in some way and at some point."

### *LGBTQ credibility*

In addition to the rape myths that they used to make sense of their experiences with sexual violence, participants also voiced concerns and experiences particular to LGBTQ identities. One respondent answered that she did not report her rape in part because of "Not wanting to have to explain what I was doing in that situation (alone drunk with a man) when I had a public reputation as a lesbian," (Respondent #85). This participant felt that their credibility as a lesbian would be threatened with the LGBTQ community at their campus, highlighting the extreme heterosexism that accompanies present understandings of sexual violence in higher education. This response also indicates the challenges of identity politics for LGBTQ student communities, including self-policing and concerns about the validity of one's sexuality.

### *Heterosexist approaches to sexual violence prevention education*

LGBTQ indicated that their institutions often implemented support measures aimed at addressing sexual violence against cisgender, heterosexual women. This is consistent with the prevailing approach to sexual violence crisis intervention undertaken by most higher education institutions; support services for cisgender, heterosexual women are prioritized and publicized<sup>1</sup>, while specific resources for LGBTQ students are not widely known, if they exist at all. One of many consequences of this approach is that LGBTQ students may feel that the support services available for sexual violence crisis intervention are exclusively for cisgender, heterosexual women, leading them to not seek help or report their own assaults.

### *Confusion for LGBTQ students about sexual violence*

Another severe consequence of this heterosexist discourse is the lack of basic sexual health information for LGBTQ students, who in turn may not be able to identify if they have experienced sexual violence. This silence reverberates within LGBTQ student communities, who may not have adequate language or information in which to discuss rape or sexual assault. This lack of adequate conversation amongst LGBTQ students about sexual violence was highlighted in the open-ended responses of participants:

"I feel like there's a lot of confusion amongst all students around rape and sexual assault in LGBTQ contexts, as that isn't what they are used to (the stereotype of always, and uniquely,

**Table 1. Perpetrator Occurrence by Sexual Assault**

Perpetrator	<i>n</i>
Girlfriend	3
Boyfriend	14
Wife	---
Husband	---
Friend (fellow student)	20
Friend (non student)	5
Date (fellow student)	4
Acquaintance (student)	8
Acquaintance (non student)	6
Stranger	17
Teacher	---
School administrator	---
Other	2
Total	79

**Table 2. Perpetrator Occurrence by Rape**

Perpetrator	<i>n</i>
Girlfriend	1
Boyfriend	2
Wife	---
Husband	---
Friend (fellow student)	1
Friend (non student)	---
Date (fellow student)	1
Date (non student)	1
Acquaintance (student)	3
Acquaintance (non student)	2
Stranger	---
Teacher	---
School administrator	---
Other	---
Total	11

<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that all heterosexual women in higher education are aware of the available resources for them in the aftermath of sexual violence or that all higher education institutions effectively publicize those resources.

male-bodied on female-bodied). There's a lot of unwanted sexual attention that is brushed aside especially in the gay male community, lots of aggressiveness goes unchecked because it's perceived to be inherent to the community.” (Respondent #67)

The respondent asserts that heterosexism is what guides present understandings of what rape and sexual assault are, which leads to confusion and miseducation for LGBTQ students. They also construct masculinity as inherently sexually aggressive, which they suggest is a pervasive quality of gay male culture. While this particular respondent is focused on what they see as the particularities of gay male communities, they nevertheless draw on understandings of men as hyper sexual and aggressive, which reflects dominant ideology about masculinity generally that absolves men of responsibility for sexual violence. This is a set of assumptions and assertions that would be well served by direct educational intervention. The specific issue of sexual violence within gay male communities that this student raises is just one critically important avenue of LGBTQ sexual violence prevention education for higher education institutions.

#### **Discussion:**

The results of this pilot study identified that LGBTQ students in the Boston area are experiencing sexual violence while in college. A number of interventions can be made by higher education administrators as part of a larger effort to disrupt the heterosexism that presently defines sexual violence prevention. The following are a list of possible interventions:

- Develop and implement sexual violence education programs that give specific examples of sexually violent behavior (for both LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students), rather than relying solely on definitions of rape or sexual assault that may seem abstract to students
- Enact recurring campus-wide programming that specifically center on the disruption of rape myths, including those that target LGBTQ populations
- Publicize the availability of student counseling services for sexual violence survivors of all genders and sexual orientations
- Include LGBTQ student representatives in discussions on how to increase student safety on campus
- Ensure that LGBTQ crisis intervention training has been provided to all campus police officials and medical professionals; publicize this training to the student body

**Table 3. Unwanted Sexual Contact by Gender Identity**

Gender	<i>n</i>	(%)
Cisgender woman	52	59.8
Cisgender man	22	25.3
Transwoman	1	1.1
Transman	2	2.3
Genderqueer	7	8.1
Other	3	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*2 respondents did not provide gender identity*

**Table 4. Unwanted Sexual Contact by Sexual Orientation**

Sexual Orientation	<i>n</i>	(%)
Prefer not to answer	1	1.1
Lesbian	19	21.3
Gay	19	21.3
Bisexual	18	20.2
Heterosexual	---	---
Asexual	2	2.3
Queer	19	21.3
Pansexual	7	8.0
Other	4	4.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>100.0</b>

# Layered Identities: Campus Climate & Identity Salience for LGBQ Students of Color

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## Introduction

This pilot study provided a qualitative exploration of the perceptions of campus climate of queer students of color offered insight into the ways that seven students negotiate their racial/ethnic and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer identities as they navigate campus climate of a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). This research brief provides a summary of five of the study's major findings: the impact of the racial climate on the students' identity salience; the relationship of the label "queer" to describe their identity; the role of visibility of a community to their sense of identity; their ability to advocate for themselves; and the influence of experiences off campus.

Interviews were conducted with seven self-identified LGBQ students attending a mid-sized research institution in the Northeast U.S. (See box for further description of each participant, including their pseudonym and the way they self-identified their race and sexual orientation.). Despite efforts to recruit a diverse sample, none of the students identified as transgender.

## Major Findings

### *Racial Climate*

Students were significantly impacted by the racial climate at the PWI than the climate for the LGBTQ community. Furthermore, the level of discourse on campus around the racial component of climate left little room for other identities.

*"I feel like we spend so much time trying to box people into these [racial] groups that we forget who we're talking about." - Nadine.*

### *Queer Identity*

The students appreciated the term queer term for the way it bridged or blurred the distinction between fixed identities such as lesbian, gay, bisexual or pan-sexual. However most of them did not apply it to themselves because they thought the word – and the accompanying identity they associated with it – was too politically charged. Activism required a visibility that students thought as people of color they could not afford. They were more likely to label white students as queer because they were activists.

*I use queer as a more inclusive term for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender... It's easier to say queer, it's just a more inclusive term for me – Simon*

## Study Participants

Garcon: 25-year old Gay Central American Latino graduate man

Linde: 22-year old Bisexual Asian-American senior woman

Nadine: 19-year old Pansexual Caribbean Multi-Racial sophomore woman

Reggie: 21-year old Gay Ghanaian Black junior man

Sinath: 22-year old Lesbian African-American senior woman

Simon: 26-year old Gay Asian-American graduate man

Theresa: 23-year old Queer Filipino graduate woman

*I think of queer as an all-encompassing or umbrella term for the LGBT community, but with the added bonus – with the added identity of activism. – Garcon*

### *Visibility & Identity Saliency*

All of the students in this study placed a high value on the visibility of others who share their identities in order to measure or gauge the safety of their environment. Consequently, they saw their identities as separate and distinct from one another.

*I feel like, separately, for LGBTQ... and people of color, the climate is... people are tolerant. Not necessarily accepting in my experience. So I feel like, to put those two together, I still feel like we're tolerated. You know, like queer people of color exist but that's it. Period. – Theresa*

*I don't see any relationship... I really don't. They're two different identities that are co-existing. Sometimes one is more at the forefront than the other. – Reggie*

### *Self-Advocacy*

The students' activities and involvement benefited the students' ability to influence the campus climate. Their positions carried influence, which impacted their ability to make a difference. They valued opportunities to learn more about their own identities and those of others through direct dialogue or in the classroom.

*It's nice to know these words and these terms so I can say how I feel and express to other people very important information that I think that everyone should know about. – Nadine*

### *Off Campus Climate*

One difficulty of assessing the climate particular to campus was the influence of the climate in the off-campus environment. Many students reported encountering the most overt or threatening acts of racism off campus that continued to be triggered by micro-aggressions on campus.

*It happens [off campus] and it affects definitely my performance here because that week, it was really hard for me to even be here... Because, like, I hated White people ... I hated White people. For that week I was mad. – Garcon*

## **Discussion**

Some of the findings were consistent with existing knowledge of the experience of queer students of color. According to the United States Student Association Foundation (USSAF, 2008), common challenges for LGBQ college students of color include tokenization; lack of recruitment and retention outreach targeting LGBQ people of color; inadequate resources for students of color in LGBQ Resource Centers; and that LGBQ students of color are commonly forced to compromise by choosing one identity over another to navigate homophobia or racism. The USSAF's findings are most unsettling because they are not new. Wall & Washington (1991), for example, first observed LGBQ students of color being forced to prioritize one identity over another more than ten years ago. This phenomenological study sought to add the knowledge about LGBQ students of colors' perceptions of their identity and campus climate at PWIs.

## **Implications**

These findings suggest the racial climate at PWIs may pose significant challenges for queer students of color to fully synthesize or integrate their dominant identities. Their LGBQ and racial identities were layered, rather than the popular conceptualization of identities as "dual" or "intersectional." Layered seems a more accurate metaphor to capture the students' ability to prioritize, de-prioritize and manage the identities.

Most of the students prioritized their racial and ethnic identities and struggled to assess the climate for queer students of color, which demonstrated a greater campus culture and system that prevented them from being able to holistically integrate the two identities when they were salient.

All interventions or services crafted to support or challenge students ought to adopt a holistic approach that offers queer students of color an opportunity to imagine a possibility or chance for integration. Multicultural centers and or student organizations that are identity-focused must be wary not to normalize a narrow view of identity and work in intersectional and collaborative ways to showcase the diversity of backgrounds represented in their community.

Researchers and practitioners who study climate at PWIs in particular, will be well served to consider the influence of the off-campus environment and its potential to be an asset or a challenge to creating an inclusive campus.

Finally, the visibility of queer people of color staff and peers who carry their sexual orientation and racial identities equally openly is vitally important to the ability of queer students of color to imagine a campus in which they can be accepted and included.

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# The Excluded Middle:

## Supporting Bisexual Students on College Campuses

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Rainbow flags represent equality and community in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning (LGBTQ) community. The stripes of different colors represent the spectrum of sexual orientation identities, representing the diversity within the LGBTQ community. However, while there is compounded strength in a large group, individual identities are easily lost and undermined for the sake of a common cause.

Often seen as outliers, bisexual people are often discriminated against within the LG(B)TQ<sup>2</sup> communities. Bisexual identity is too often invalidated and seen as a transitory sexual orientation, a form of homosexual denial, a way to embody heterosexual privilege, or as hyper-sexual. These myths perpetuate biphobia, excluding and invalidating bisexual identity. It is imperative that student affairs professionals understand the impact biphobia has on bisexual identity development and leadership development in order to best support students.

### Myths

Hegemonic society enforces a sexual orientation binary, hindering the true understanding that all people cannot be boxed into monosexual categories. This master narrative influences lesbian- and gay-identified individuals to police this sexual dichotomy upon bisexual and all other non-conforming LGBTQ people (Rust, 2000). This forced split sends a clear message that sustains common myths: bisexuality either does not exist at all or is viewed as an unstable condition (Rust, 2000). Zinik (2000) stated directly, “indeed, bisexuality may even appear more threatening than homosexuality since it disrupts the conventional belief that people can be classified into two distinct sexual groups” (p. 57).

The idea of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) dictates that people are universally presumed to identify as heterosexual in the absence of any public actions that would imply the contrary. This assumption erases LGBTQ people until they are driven to disclose their true identities or remain closeted. Additionally, Zinik (2000) proposed an untold yet understood “one drop” rule that applies for homosexuality. Therefore, if any action or behavior is perceived to be homosexual in nature, people are assumed to be homosexual, “regardless of the amount of heterosexual experience” (p. 56).

In Rust’s (2000) discussion of “The Law of the Excluded Middle,” she explained that any homosexual act automatically classifies an individual as lesbian or gay. She went beyond this point to explain that any heterosexual behavior thereafter is considered counterfeit, disallowing for any dual attraction and discounting the full experience of bisexuality. This “law” perpetuates the concept that bisexual people are in denial of their true homosexual identity and sole attraction in the same gender. Zinik (2000) explained that members of heterosexual and lesbian and gay communities view bisexuality as a “failure to adjust to homosexual orientation” (p. 56). This stems from the mentality that sexual orientation exists as a mutually exclusive dichotomy of attraction to two different sexes, denying the possibility or existence of bisexuality.

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<sup>2</sup> I enclose the ‘B’ in parentheses to signify the discrimination and isolation felt by and within the broader LGBTQ community.

A widespread term used to describe bisexuality is “fence-sitting,” describing a supposed fear of commitment to anyone or confusion about their identities (Ochs, 2001). This sentiment perpetuates the belief that bisexual people are questioning their identities and that bisexuality is not a self-contained identity. In her first LGB identity development model, Cass (1979) declared that a bisexual self-identity delays and prevents a positive homosexual identity. Though she later retracted her statement and validated bisexuality as a freestanding identity (Cass, 1990), the LGBTQ community adopted this notion, rejecting bisexuality as a true, independent identity (Fox, 1995).

The truth is that bisexual people do not avoid the homosexual stigma, nor do they own heterosexual privilege of the same status as heterosexually-identified people. Bisexual people often feel obligated to fight for their true identities to be represented or to blend into gay or heterosexual cultures. However, this attempt at blending does not come without the pain of compromise, causing some to regress back into the closet and to deny their true selves. In addition, bisexual people, seen as dodging the homosexual stigma, are victims of prejudice and discrimination by their lesbian and gay counterparts.

Another barrier to understanding bisexual identity is what Zinik (2000) described as “the conflict model of bisexuality.” This logic holds that since gender is viewed as a binary where women and men are seen as polar opposites, “it appears contradictory that anyone could eroticize two opposite things at the same time” (pp. 55-57). This phenomenon leads to the misperceptions that bisexual people are confused or conflicted about their true identities, transitioning temporarily between a lesbian or gay and a heterosexual identity, or are denying their true identity, usually their presumably homosexual orientation, due to internalized homophobia (Zinik, 2000).

The definition of bisexuality primarily as a dual attraction to men and women limits the frame of the total bisexual identity and experience. Clare Hemmings (2002, p. 26) stated:

For bisexuals, the different sexual object choices they have made are precisely what allow them to occupy bisexual subject positions, and to imagine themselves to do so. It is a present with only one lover of one sex, not a past, that poses the most problems for bisexual identity. What if this is the last person I desire? How can my future bisexuality be assured?

This statement speaks to the limiting factors in understanding bisexuality merely as a dual attraction, defining bisexual people merely by the gender identities of their partners. This thought further erases bisexual people and their bisexual identities and experiences, bounding them by the binary of homosexuality or heterosexuality. The idea Hemmings articulates also dehumanizes bisexual people by looking to the gender identity of their partners to make assumptions about their sexual orientations. This further erases bisexual people and robs them of their agency to use their voices to own and articulate their identities.

Another pervasive misperception of bisexual people is that they are extra- or hyper-sexual, due to their dual attraction (Paul, 2000). There is an immediate expectation that if someone is attracted to more than one gender, they are doubly sexual. This also adds to the misperception that bisexual people are not capable of commitment or monogamous relationships. This stigma stems from erotophobia and the shame in thinking of sexuality in terms of sex (Paul, 2000). Erotophobia affects all LGBTQ people, as any sexual behavior that does not involve two and only two, individuals of different genders is seen as deviant in the eyes of heteronormative society.

### **The Importance of Bisexual Visibility and Support for Bisexual Students**

The many myths and prejudices that marginalize bisexual people within LG(B)TQ and heterosexual communities paint a tainted understanding of LGBTQ experiences and facilitate biphobia and bisexual erasure within the LG(B)TQ community. Therefore, knowing that bisexual students have different experiences than their monosexual friends, student affairs professionals have a duty to understand how to best support them.

Literature points to affirming ways to include bisexual people in LGBTQ research (Rust, 2009), including ways to recruit subjects and be sure to fully grasp each person's individual identity, as too often bisexual people are defined by their current partner's gender. Researchers must challenge these misconstrued methods in which they study and discuss LGBTQ populations in order to give voice and agency to the true bisexual experience.

One way of incorporating visibility of bisexual people is to foster an affinity space community within an LGBTQA Center or other organization on campus. When bisexual students hold the agency to inform the campus, dispel biphobia, and affirm and empower other bisexual students, they create a needed community and develop as campus leaders.

The first step that student affairs professionals and others can follow to actively improve the situation of bisexual erasure and biphobia in their communities is to read and learn about bisexuality. The myths and prejudices are embedded into society, and often, the discrimination against bisexual people is not intentionally malicious. Therefore, it is of utmost importance for administrators and educators to dispel the misperceptions by actively seeking the truth about bisexual identity and experiences. It is important to understand bisexuality as a multidimensional identity, involving not only attraction to two sexes, but socialization and authentic self-expression. Bisexual identity impacts all aspects of a person's life and personal paradigm.

It is commonly heard that we cannot be what we do not see. Therefore, when bisexual people are ignored or persecuted by LG(B)TQ and heterosexual communities, they begin to inhabit an excluded middle, a double closet. Similarly, when student affairs researchers and practitioners neglect to include bisexual students in their studies of LGBTQ student involvement, they stifle bisexual identity processes and true understanding of LGBTQ student leadership development. Lumping bisexual people into LGBTQ research not only models that bisexual people do not exist or that they have the same experiences of their lesbian and gay counterparts, but it also falsely represents LGBTQ people, spoiling and therefore negating the research (Rust, 2009).

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## BOOK SUMMARY

# Beyond Surviving: From Religious Oppression to Queer Activism

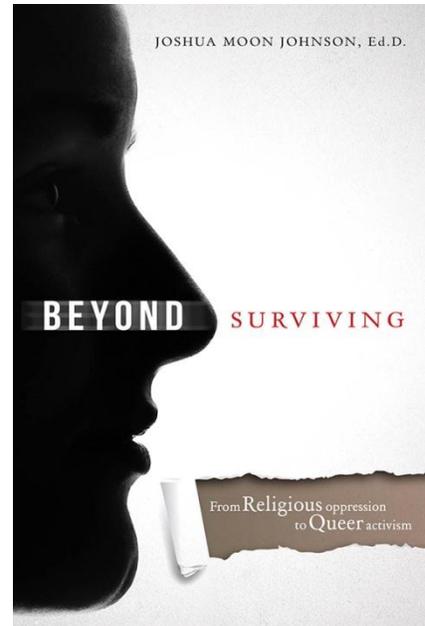
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This book vividly brings voice to the stories of Christian students in same-sex relationships as they encountered oppression, relationships, and then a passion for social justice. Each of the students had early experiences related to family, religious, and educational socialization, which framed the ways in which they experienced their same-sex relationships as students. Although there were many positive outcomes of being in a same-sex relationship, all of the participants described internal and external conflicts that they had to manage and overcome. These stories are filled with attempts of suicide, physical and verbal abuse, isolation, loneliness, depression, and hospitalizations; moreover, they are also filled with triumph, self-realizations, community building, and the development of powerful queer leaders. These students turned their oppressive experiences into fuel for queer activism. Each student's story is unique, heart breaking, and charged with unrelenting perseverance. The conflicts described related to a). seeking family support, b). having to hide relationships, c). seeking community acceptance, d). deconstructing socialization, and e). doubting the morality of the relationship.

It has been discussed for some time now that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have conflicts as they begin to understand their sexuality, but Christian people usually face more challenges and higher levels of anxiety. When Christian students engage in same-sex relationships and face severe emotional conflicts, their spiritual well-being can suffer. While students are in college their spiritual well-being must be supported in order to foster holistic development. People with same-sex attractions often feel like they must choose either their religion and spirituality or their same-sex relationship. In order to support all students, educators should understand the multiple dynamics that take place within students' lives. Christian students engaged in same-sex relationships may need different and additional types of support.

Identity conflict occurs in all people and it often centers around race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, and/or ability. *Beyond Surviving* brings attention to the identity conflicts students face everyday; moreover, these stories focus on students' religious and sexual identity. Their stories also bring in other aspects of their identity including class, ability, race, and gender. Readers will gain a new understanding of identity development as it takes place in the lives of real students; their stories go beyond a theory or model and show the beautiful complexity of human development. No two stories are like and no two experiences of LGBTQ Christians are the same.

*Beyond Surviving* shares stories which will help Christian, non-Christian, and non-religious people gain understanding of how complex identity is, and how people from all backgrounds must



deconstruct the ideas society provides about who people are. Readers will quickly be captivated by the students' vulnerability, hope, and passion to help others. Tyler forgiving his mom after she violently attacked him and institutionalized him will bring tears of sadness and hope. Donald's decision to not take his life in order to be an example for his nephew demonstrates his selfless commitment to serving others. He Jooni's persistence in finding a church community that does not condemn her will allow readers to understand the complications of finding a religious community. Mark's story brings light to the challenges people face as they attempt to figure out how their African-American heritage, Christian religion, and sexuality fit in their lives. Eric describes his transition from getting an exorcism, to protesting Christian colleges, and then an Ivy League religious studies program. Readers will close this book with new understandings of the diverse struggles people face resolving how their religion, spirituality, and sexuality fit within their lives. Moreover, readers will be inspired to embrace challenges and fight to change the society they live in rather than change themselves to fit society.

Suicide was a common theme and it is rarely talked about with youth; *Beyond Surviving* openly shares how religious and sexual identity struggles can lead people into desperate and hopeless situations. During the last few years there have been several notable incidents of suicides among LGBT youth, and the problem is not going away. The religious identities of these students were not discussed, but non-heterosexual students face intense emotional challenges on a college campus, and religious identity can further complicate those challenges. There is little knowledge available for people to utilize to provide adequate support to students facing intense identity conflicts. There are also very few resources available to students on how to manage these conflicts, which is why *Beyond Surviving* will help educators better understand the experiences, challenges, and resources needed to support Christian students in same-sex relationships.

As each student struggled to overcome internal and external conflicts they relied on a variety of institutional and individual resources, which provided support to them as they attempted to resolve challenges with their religious, spiritual, and sexual identities. Some institutional support systems included university lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) campus centers and student organizations, supportive and well-informed counselors, and openly affirming churches. Some of the individual support systems included university student affairs staff members, close friends, wellness and stress management events, and media venues that positively portrayed non-heterosexual people. These students did more than just wait for it to get better or just survive the oppression they faced from families, schools, the LGBT community, and religious institutions; they thrived as community and educational leaders. Through their pain they triumphed to inspire others to overcome obstacles and create change in their communities.

Not only will readers gain a greater ability to support students facing challenges with conflicting identities, but they will also be inspired to approach their institutions with a passion to advocate for themselves and other marginalized communities. *Beyond Surviving* brings attention to a neglected group, shares resources necessary for saving lives, and also inspires students to seek out support systems that empower them to become change agents on their campuses. Everyone will put this book down and be inspired to push for their communities to be more welcoming and inclusive communities for all.