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## Experiences of LGBTQ Students at a Primarily White Institution in the South

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Experiences of LGBTQ Students at a Primarily White Institution in the South

by

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Bachelor of the Arts  
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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

Educational Foundations and Inquiry

College of Education

University of South Carolina

2015

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## **DEDICATION**

To Mom

*For teaching me the value of hard work,*

To Dad

*For teaching me the value of perseverance,*

To Mary

*For teaching me the value of ceaseless positivity,*

To Scott

*For loving me every step of the way,*

And to Grant

*In hopes that things can change.*

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someone finally “got it” when it came to balancing qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the United States, often Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning (LGBTQ) students are targets of verbal harassment and violence due to their sexual orientation or gender identity and gender expression. Further, 31 states do not offer protection against sexuality- or gender identity-based discrimination (ACLU, 2015). Schools are particularly vexing places, where L, G, B, T, and/or Q-identified students face difficulties due to the privileging of heterosexual students and heteronormativity. In universities across the nation, suicide rates continue to climb for LGBTQ populations due to heterosexist policies, procedures, and practices, which lead to negative campus climates (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Howard & Stevens, 2000; Rankin, 2003).

In this study, I used a mixed-methods approach to examine the campus climate for LGBTQ students who are out at a primarily white institution (PWI) in the South. I hypothesized that students who were out would experience campus climate more negatively than those who were not. While my findings did not indicate a significant relationship between outness and campus climate variables, students reported experiencing harassment on campus and negative experiences with Greek Life. Moreover, 81% reported passing as straight to maintain comfort on campus.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 THE ISSUE IN CONTEXT .....	1
1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM.....	6
1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY .....	12
1.4 STUDY DESIGN AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	12
1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	14
1.6 LIMITATIONS .....	16
1.7 DISSERTATION LAYOUT .....	17
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	18
2.1 HISTORIES AND ORIGINS OF LGBT STUDIES .....	18
2.2 THEORISTS WHO INFORM MY WORK.....	22
2.3 COMING OUT, YOUTH EXPERIENCES .....	30
2.4 CAMPUS CLIMATES .....	56
2.5 GLSEN’S CLIMATE STUDY DOMAINS.....	58
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY .....	62



3.1 METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION.....	62
3.2 EMIC AND ETIC DATA .....	70
3.3 SOURCES FOR DATA COLLECTION .....	71
3.4 DESCRIPTION OF STUDY SITE AND PARTICIPANTS .....	73
3.5 ANALYSIS.....	79
3.6 REFLEXIVITY .....	82
3.7 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMIC ORIENTATIONS.....	94
3.8 STUDY SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS.....	96
3.9 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MY STUDY DESIGN .....	100
3.10 RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, AND TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	103
3.11 CONFIDENTIALITY .....	109
3.12 INSTRUMENTS.....	110
CHAPTER 4: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS.....	111
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	111
4.2 THEME 1: OUTNESS .....	112
4.3 THEME 2: PASSING PRIVILEGE.....	121
4.4 THEME 3: AFFIRMATION.....	134
4.5 CONSTRUCT: CAMPUS CLIMATE .....	137
4.6 THE SOUTH.....	153
CHAPTER 5: SURVEY ANALYSIS.....	155
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	155
5.2 RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS AND OUTNESS .....	156
5.3 DOMAIN I: SCHOOL SAFETY .....	160

5.4 DOMAIN II: EXPOSURE TO BIASED LANGUAGE.....	163
5.5 DOMAIN III: EXPERIENCES OF HARRASSMENT AND ASSAULT AT SCHOOL .....	166
5.6 DOMAIN IV: REPORTING OF SCHOOL-BASED HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT .....	169
5.7 DOMAIN V: EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AT SCHOOL.....	171
5.8 DOMAIN VI: HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES .....	174
5.9 DOMAIN VII: PASSING PRIVILEGE .....	175
5.10 OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS.....	177
5.11 CONCLUSION .....	186
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	187
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	187
6.2 DISCUSSION .....	187
6.3 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS .....	201
6.4 IMPLICATIONS .....	203
6.5 FUTURE RESEARCH .....	207
REFERENCES .....	210
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL.....	228
APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP – INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT .....	230
APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP – RECRUITMENT E-MAIL.....	232
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP – IRB APPROVAL .....	234
APPENDIX E – SURVEY INSTRUMENT .....	235
APPENDIX F – SURVEY IRB APPROVAL.....	249
APPENDIX G – SEC COMPARISON OF LGBT CAMPUS RESOURCES .....	250

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 3.1 FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS .....	76
TABLE 5.1 YEAR IN SCHOOL .....	157
TABLE 5.2 RESIDENCE .....	157
TABLE 5.3 SEXUAL ORIENTATION .....	158
TABLE 5.4 GENDER IDENTITY .....	159
TABLE 5.5 RACE AND ETHNICITY .....	159
TABLE 5.6 OUTNESS ON CAMPUS AND AT HOME .....	160
TABLE 5.7 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR LIKERT TYPE QUESTIONS ABOUT SAFETY .....	162
TABLE 5.8 CORRELATIONS FOR SAFETY WITH OUTNESS.....	163
TABLE 5.9 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR LIKERT-TYPE QUESTIONS ABOUT BIASED LANGUAGE .....	164
TABLE 5.10 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR LIKERT-TYPE QUESTIONS ABOUT BIASED LANGUAGE .....	164
TABLE 5.11 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS FOR EXPOSURE TO BIASED LANGUAGE TOTALS .....	165
TABLE 5.12 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT EXPERIENCES OF HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT .....	167
TABLE 5.13 CORRELATIONS FOR HARASSMENT WITH OUTNESS .....	168
TABLE 5.14 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR LIKERT-TYPE QUESTIONS ABOUT REPORTING OF SCHOOL-BASED HARASSMENT .....	169
TABLE 5.15 CORRELATIONS FOR REPORTING WITH OUTNESS .....	170

TABLE 5.16 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR YES OR NO QUESTIONS CONCERNING POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND RESOURCES .....	171
TABLE 5.17 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AT SCHOOL.....	172
TABLE 5.18 CORRELATIONS FOR DISCRIMINATION WITH OUTNESS .....	172
TABLE 5.19 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR YES OR NO QUESTIONS CONCERNING HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.....	174
TABLE 5.20 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR LIKERT-TYPE QUESTIONS ABOUT PASSING – SEXUAL ORIENTATION .....	176
TABLE 5.21 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR LIKERT-TYPE QUESTIONS ABOUT PASSING – GENDER IDENTITY .....	176
TABLE 5.22 CORRELATIONS FOR DISCRIMINATION WITH OUTNESS .....	177
TABLE 5.23 RESPONSES TO “HOW DO YOU THINK LGBTQ POPULATIONS ARE PERCEIVED ON CAMPUS?” .....	182

## LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1.1 AN EXAMPLE OF ANIMATION DEMONSTRATING ROMANTIC FEELINGS BETWEEN HARUKA (LEFT) AND MICHIRU (RIGHT). .....	8
FIGURE 4.1 QUESTIONS ABOUT OUTNESS. ....	116
FIGURE 4.2 QUESTIONS ADDED DUE TO FINDINGS AROUND ACTIVISM.....	117
FIGURE 4.3 QUESTIONS ABOUT OUTNESS. ....	122
FIGURE 4.4 DIAGRAM OF SEX AND GENDER. ....	127
FIGURE 4.5 QUESTIONS ADDED TO THE SURVEY CONCERNING PASSING PRIVILEGE. ....	133
FIGURE 4.6 QUESTIONS CONCERNING FEELING CELEBRATED AND NURTURED .....	136
FIGURE 4.7 ADDITIONS TO QUESTIONS RELATED TO GREEK LIFE.....	141
FIGURE 4.8 QUESTIONS ADDED TO THE SURVEY RELATED TO THIS CLASSROOM DYNAMICS. ....	144
FIGURE 4.9 QUESTIONS ADDED TO THE SURVEY CONCERNING SAFETY AND COMFORT .....	150
FIGURE 5.1 GRAPH DEMONSTRATING THE FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES FOR OUTNESS AT HOME AND OUTNESS AT SCHOOL.....	160
FIGURE 5.2 BAR GRAPH DEMONSTRATING THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED FEELING UNSAFE DUE TO ASPECTS OF THEIR IDENTITY .....	161
FIGURE 5.3 BAR GRAPH REPRESENTING THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED FEELING UNSAFE IN SPECIFIC SPACES ON CAMPUS .....	161
FIGURE 5.4 BAR GRAPH REPRESENTING THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED VERBAL HARASSMENT AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE ON CAMPUS IN SPECIFIC LOCATIONS .....	168
FIGURE 5.5 BAR GRAPH REPRESENTING THE NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DISCRIMINATORY ACTIONS AT SRU.....	173

## CHAPTER 1:

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Issue in Context

In the United States many Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning<sup>123</sup> (LGBTQ) individuals experience verbal and physical harassment due to their perceived or known sexual orientation or gender identity; heterosexual harassment includes hate speech and violent attacks (GLSEN 2013; Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Howard & Stevens, 2000; Rankin, 2003). Moreover, in the U.S. most states refuse to provide legal protection to LGBTQ individuals. Only 19 states, Washington DC, and Puerto Rico protect LGBTQ individuals through anti-discrimination law. Across the South and through much of the Midwest, LGBTQ individuals may be fired at any time due to perceived or known sexual orientation or gender identity (ACLU, 2015; Barton, 2011; GLSEN, 2004). As such anti-LGBT employers may discriminate and terminate

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the acronym LGBTQ in this dissertation. LGBTQ reflects the combination of the terms Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning. This acronym is used by organizations and think tanks alike to refer to sexual minority populations (GLSEN, 2012; HRC 2015; Williams Institute, 2015). Throughout this study, I may use the acronym as a whole or to refer to certain identities without others (LGB, GQ, etc.), and also use L, G, B, T, and/or Q when referring to an individual.

<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to use Q in my study to refer to Queer or Questioning. Queer may refer to individuals who are gender queer, identify as queer in reference to their sexuality or may refer to the deconstruction of monolithic categories, alternative deployment, or reappropriation of dominant categories and meanings (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 1990; 2012). In addition to honoring these specific uses, I am using Q in honor of my many friends who identify with the term.

<sup>3</sup> Researchers may choose to include asexual when studying sexuality, changing the acronym here to LGBTQA (Chasin, 2011). In this study, I will not be examining the experiences of those who are asexual or nonsexual. According to DeLuzio Chasin (2011), “Asexual people are those who experience little or no sexual attraction and/or who identify with asexuality” (p. 713). I acknowledge here that while I do believe that asexual populations are also deserving of study, I have chosen not to include these populations within this study.

with impunity against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer individuals. L, G, B, T, or Q-identified employees facing discrimination and harassment from coworkers with anti-LGBTQ views have no legal recourse. Sears (1991) documented cases that resulted in the termination of teachers who were accused of educational and sexual misconduct for identifying simply as LGBTQ inside or outside the classroom. Nondiscrimination clauses that would prohibit the ill-treatment of LGBTQ individuals in the workplace do not exist in most states (ACLU, 2015). Of those states with anti-discrimination laws, none are in the South—California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and Washington.

Often LGBTQ individuals are “othered<sup>4</sup>” within educational spaces and contexts, too, due to the privileging of heterosexual students and ideals (Kumashiro, 2000). Jung and Smith (1993) argued that heterosexual ideals and heterosexism referred to the ideology heterosexuals perpetuated in society, which reproduced heterosexuality as a dominant social norm. Discrimination against same sex couples who are not heterosexual and cisgender<sup>5</sup> privileged can be immense, affecting their rights as citizens and as human beings (Jung & Smith, 1993). Researchers have found that the dominance of heterosexism harms LGBTQ individuals. For example, Mustanski, Garofalo, and Amerson (2010) found that each instance of victimization due to physical or verbal harassment multiplied by two and a half the likelihood of an LGBT youth self-harming.

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<sup>4</sup> Kumashiro (2000) defined privileging as the process by which “society chooses individuals [to be privileged, or held as superior] due to their state of being” (e.g. race, class, appearance, etc.) (p. 25). Othered here refers to those who are marginalized by the process of privileging.

<sup>5</sup> According to Johnson (20012), “the concepts of cisgender and cissex are designed to disrupt gendered normativity and were coined to resist the way that ‘woman’ or ‘man’ can mean ‘nontransgendered woman’ or ‘nontransgendered man’ by default” (p. 137-138).

Self-harming included purposeful, physical harm to one's self, such as cutting, scratching, or burning. Across the U.S. in institutions of higher education (IHEs), suicide rates continue to rise amongst LGBTQ students. In 1989, Gibson documented that gay and lesbian youth were two to three times more likely to attempt suicide compared to their straight peers. Two decades later Kann, Olsen, McManus, Kinchen, Chyen, Harris, and Wechsler (2011) noted that sexual minority students were four times more likely to attempt suicide than their straight peers. Kann et al. documented that the suicide attempts by LGBT youth were four to six times more likely to result in an injury that required medical treatment when compared to their straight peers.

The loss of young lives in LGBTQ communities due to heterosexual harassment and assault by straight peers, family, and public institutions has grown at such alarming rates that President Obama filmed a video for the "It Gets Better" project, expressing his disdain for bullying. In it, he stated:

I don't know what it's like to be picked on for being gay, but I do know what it's like to grow up feeling that sometimes you don't belong. It's tough, and for a lot of kids, the sense of being alone or apart, I know can just wear on you, and when you're teased or bullied, it can seem like somehow you brought this on yourself, for being different, or for not fitting in with everybody else. But I want to say this – you are not alone. You didn't do anything wrong. You didn't do anything to deserve being bullied (It Gets Better, 2014).

Campaign speakers for "It Gets Better" promoted hopefulness to let LGBTQ youth and advocated for belief in the future. Campaign speakers wanted LGBTQ youth to know that their lives will get better, regardless of how challenging surviving anti-LGBT



discrimination may be. Campaign speakers referred to work toward LGBTQ justice and shared messages of inspiration and change (It Gets Better Project, 2015). While I am grateful for the campaign and President Obama's efforts, I am bothered that heterosexism and homophobia pervade our current national climate and produce such a crisis among LGBTQ youth. What I argue should be a discussion about what steps are needed for LGBTQ justice (e.g., passing non-discriminatory legislation) has been instead a discussion about stating the need to take steps. Even President Obama failed to take action, only sharing with LGBTQ youth that their lives will get better, and that they do not deserve the treatment they are receiving. I would hope that the population of this country would worry more about the fact that children are killing themselves than about their own personal convictions. Certainly, in the South, this is not the case.

Many southern states constitute a section of the U.S. referred to as the 'Bible Belt' (Sears, 1991). The Bible Belt refers to an area stretching from the southeast to the middle of the country, which is well known by individuals both within and outside the area for its strict conservatism linked to deeply held Christian religious beliefs (Barton, 2011; Sears, 1991; Sears & Williams, 1997). Barton (2011) found that roughly 40% of individuals in the South (Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia) identified as Evangelical Christian. He argued that often Evangelical Christians believed in political conservatism. In many ways Evangelical Christianity dovetails easily with political conservatism. In his research with LGB individuals in the South, Sears (1991) documented the role of the Church in his participants' lives. All of his participants described encounters with conservatives who used the Church as the basis and justification of their anti-LGBT discrimination.

Even though the Bible cannot be legally cited in state contexts due to the separation of church and state, Birden, Gaither, and Laird (2000) argued, “biblically grounded popular opinion can be and often is cited in state contexts without explicit biblical references” (p. 641). For example, Birden et al. cited southern Christian conservatism as a plague on sex education and science education. Sex educators were required to teach abstinence only due the effects of conservative Christian thought on school policy.

Not surprisingly, social science researchers (Barton, 2011; Dews & Law, 2001; Sears, 1991; Sears & Williams, 1997) found that southerners were less tolerant than populations in other regions of the United States. Because of the way biblical references have been deployed in the South, it is imperative for researchers studying social contexts in the South to heed the prevalence of southern conservatism and its intersection with Christian faith. Historically, LGBTQ populations in the South have been often the targets of the Christian religious right (Barton, 2011).

Given the strength of Christian religious conservatism in the South, many schools in southern states have struggled to establish LGBT student groups in secondary and postsecondary spaces (Birden, Gaither, & Laired, 2000; GLSEN, 2004; Lugg, 2005). Anti-LGBTQ discrimination has produced challenges for Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs) in middle and high schools (Quasha, McCabe, College, and Ortiz, 2014) and resource centers in institutions of higher education (Rankin, 2003; Ritchie & Banning, 2001). I have provided a chart in Appendix F in which I demonstrate the campus resources allotted to institutions of higher education in the South Eastern Conference (SEC).

I argue that for LGBTQ students coming of age in the South, navigating such oppressions is particularly difficult. My dissertation research on campus climate for LGBTQ individuals who are out took place in the South, specifically, at a predominantly white university (PWI). I thought I would provide layered insights into (1) the intersections of the discrimination heterosexual and cis-gender privileged, political, and religious conservatives perpetuate (2) the ways LGBTQ students enrolled at a PWI in the South endure such discrimination. However, in Chapter 6, I have discussed the lack of saliency of data concerning the South.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

**The Issue.** In my study, I examined the campus climate for out LGBTQ individuals at an IHE in the South. The institution was a predominantly white university located in the southeast. I used both focus groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009) and survey research (Fink, 2012; Fowler, 2014) to analyze LGBTQ experiences of campus climate.

Mayo (2007) defined being “out” as when an individual “self-consciously and publicly identifies” as a member of “a sexual minority group” (p. 82). Coming out is a process that is context specific. The spaces, times, and types of people to whom one is out may change. Coming out is dependent on each individual circumstance (Mayo, 2007; Rankin, 2003). For some LGBT individuals, being out means becoming political (Rhoads, 1994) or actively working to disrupt and provoke the dominant discourse (Mayo, 2007).

Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger, & Hope (2013) defined campus climate as the cumulative attitudes and behaviors of students that concern access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs. Since 1990, researchers at the Gay,

Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) have examined campus climates in relation to LGBT student experiences. Generally, GLSEN (2011; 2012; 2013) researchers have found that LGBTQ k-12 students who were out reported higher levels of victimization and discrimination – however, LGBTQ k-12 students who were out reported lower levels of depression, higher self-esteem, and a greater sense of belonging within their school environment than those who were not out.

GLSEN used a construct that consisted of six domains to study campus climate; (1) school safety, (2) exposure to biased language, (3) experiences of harassment and assault on campus, (4) reporting of school or campus based harassment and assault, (5) experiences of discrimination on campus, and (6) hostile campus climates’ effects on academic outcomes.

Through survey research I examined GLSEN’s domains at a PWI in the South. To protect the anonymity of my participants, I called this PWI Southern Research University (SRU). In addition to the survey research, I conducted focus groups to examine what representations of daily life out L, G, B, T, and/or Q students shared and used these experiences to alter existing survey questions and create new survey questions. I have analyzed what relationships exist across LGBTQ students’ articulations in the survey data and focus groups.

**My Positionality.** One of the reasons I am passionate about eradicating heterosexual discrimination against LGBTQ individuals in the South is because I grew up in the region and have family members who identify as gay and lesbian. Both influenced my decision to study heterosexism and discrimination against LGBTQ youth. As a young child, I had a gay grandfather and a lesbian aunt. I did not have the words “gay” and

“lesbian” as labels or identities to attach to them; all that I knew was that my grandfather lived with a man and my aunt lived with a woman. I began to understand that these were romantic relationships, and that people had romantic relationships with others of the same sex, once I started watching Japanese animation (anime). My favorite show at thirteen-years-old featured two female characters who were in love with each other – however, in the English-speaking version of the show broadcast in the U.S., these two characters were simply cousins. The representation of the characters as cousins did not always make sense with the animation. Often they would hold hands or simply look at each other in a way that expressed loving romantic feelings (Please see Figure 1.1 for an example). It was only after browsing fan-made websites that I found the truth about Michiru and Haruka.



*Figure 1.1* An example of animation demonstrating romantic feelings between Haruka (left) and Michiru (right).

At the time, this thirteen-year-old version of myself was confused over the fact that the television network had hidden this relationship from viewers. The subterfuge made me wonder if two women loving each other was wrong. I decided to ask my mother about my aunt's and grandfather's relationships, which she confirmed were loving romantic relationships by saying "Oh, I thought you already knew that!" Her reaction normalized their relationships, and instead of wondering if the relationship was wrong, I began to feel angry that the English-speaking version of Michiru and Haruka had been totally altered. My anger stemmed from the thought: If Michiru and Haruka's relationship was censored, people may think my aunt's and grandfather's relationships should be censored as well.

When I was 14, following my parents' divorce, my mother came out to me as a lesbian. It was another event that normalized homosexuality in my mind, as I had always seen my mom as a normal person and did not see why she would not be normal now that she was dating women. My mom was incredibly worried that I would reject her, as the only time we had discussed sexuality was when I asked about my aunt and grandfather the previous year. Although she was concerned, when she told me, I replied, "Okay. Can I call my boyfriend back now? It's not like it's a big deal." My mother still enjoys joking about this conversation and reminding me of how terrified she was about coming out to me, not knowing how I would react. She has often said, "Here I was having this crisis, and you were just like, 'Yeah, so?'"

Although lesbian and gay identities had been normalized for me, when my mom came out, I began to experience and witness hatred from people. I was picked on in high school for having a mother who was a lesbian, and constantly asked if I was also a

lesbian. I began to see hatred expressed toward her from family and friends, too. The most difficult experience for her during this time was losing her family. Her parents had passed, but her brothers and sister stopped speaking with her because they felt as though homosexuality was in complete disagreement with their political and religious ideologies. Instead of responding to their abandonment and discrimination with sadness and grief, I became angry. I worked through this anger by participating in heated verbal exchanges with any friend, peer, or adult who had anything negative to say about homosexuality.

Through my years as a teenager and later as a young adult, I made many friends who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. I sat with them when they came out to their parents, and when they were kicked out of their homes due to their parents' conservative religious and political beliefs. I listened to them when they were sent to church or camps for conversion therapy—processes that did nothing but harm. I became angrier. I could not understand why anyone would treat others so poorly just because they deviated from a social norm.

As an undergraduate at East Carolina University, I began to approach issues surrounding homosexuality from an academic position. I majored in sociology and focused on gender and sexuality issues. During my senior year, when it came time to apply for internships, a sociology professor, who was conducting a climate survey on campus for LGBT students, faculty, and staff, offered me a position to intern on the project. It was the first time that I had heard of a climate study, and the first time I understood how cultures could produce “climates” which in turn could affect individuals. I was involved in many aspects of the study. I conducted a literature review, put the survey instrument online, and ran statistical analyses. The results were presented to the

president and board of trustees at the university and eventually led to the establishment of gender-neutral bathrooms and an LGBT student resource center on campus (Sifter, 2011).

Two years later, I taught eighth grade for almost a year while I was a master's student in teaching. During that time a student who thought that he might be gay approached me to talk. Instantly, I was worried about my job security, as the state in which I was teaching did not allow teachers to discuss homosexuality due to abstinence-only policies. I was not sure how my principal would react if he were to find out that I was discussing sexuality with a student. I remember that I was bothered immensely by the fact that I was limited in the ways I could communicate with students. At the time, I was privileged enough to be in a position where if I lost my job and I could have lived comfortably due to my husband's income, so I decided to take the risk and talk to my student. I never got in trouble, but the school policy both angered and bothered me because it felt unjust. When it came time to choose a dissertation topic, I knew that I wanted to use my prior experiences and knowledge to further explore issues facing LGBTQ community members, particularly, LGBTQ youth.

My experiences witnessing the treatment of LGBTQ family and friends has pushed me to examine ways in which researchers and educators can improve institutional climates. I designed my study to explore the climate of a university campus. I have found a disciplinary home in the field of education as I attempt to better understand educational environments and the experiences of L,G,B,T, or Q students of all ages. My own personal experiences have led me to see that educational spaces can be difficult for L, G, B, T, or Q students, and I would like to do what I can to further the causes of justice and equity for LGBTQ communities.



### **1.3 The Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study was designed to assist in filling gaps in the literature concerning experiences of LGBTQ students who are out on college campuses. While GLSEN (2013) has examined high school students' outness and the affects of being out on their secondary school experiences, the same relationship has not been studied in higher education. I argue that university spaces are nuanced and complex, as students spend time in myriad spaces: classrooms, residence halls, resource centers, student centers, and at formal and informal campus events. For postsecondary students campus life can and often does constitute their entire social world (Rund, 2002). Therefore, studying the cultural context in which LGBTQ students are studying and socializing at SRU allowed me to understand how a LGBTQ students experience the microsociey at SRU. Second, I plan to present my findings to university officials at SRU. I want to share both areas and issues that LGBTQ students identified as needing improvement and those areas and spaces where LGBTQ individuals felt affirmed and supported. As Mayo (2007) argued, climate studies can be used to make universities more accountable to the LGBTQ population, as LGBTQ students are often an underserved population group.

### **1.4 Study Design and Research Questions**

**Study Design.** I used a mixed-methods design in this study. According to Creswell (2012), a mixed-methods research design is “a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or a series of studies to understand a research problem” (p. 535). Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies within a singular study gave me the opportunity

to provide a stronger, more in-depth understanding of the research question and problem (Creswell, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Patton, 2002).

This particular study consisted of qualitative focus groups and a quantitative survey. Focus groups allowed me to understand the depth of what LGBTQ students experience on campus and to examine issues that LGBTQ students deemed important. The quantitative survey allowed me to assess whether or not possible trends in the results were generalizable across the LGBTQ population at SRU<sup>6</sup>.

In mixed-methods design, often focus groups provide the ability to effectively explore topics that are important to groups of people who are similar to those being surveyed (Blackstone, 2012; Fowler, 2014; Roulston, 2011). Focus groups provide context to the researcher, and data about the group (Blackstone, 2012; Fowler, 2014; Roulston, 2011). I chose to approach my research using a mixed methodology design, because I believe that while qualitative researchers produce rich representations of lived experiences, which are important for in-depth understandings of particular phenomena, quantitative researchers produce compelling data, too. I believe statistical analysis can easily spark change, in this particular case, possibly policy change. This belief is one that I examine in more detail in Chapter 3, where I expounded on my design in more detail as well.

**Research Questions.** For my study, I hypothesized that LGBTQ students who are out experience increased exposure to biased language and more harassment than LGBTQ students who are not out. I also hypothesized that LGBTQ students who are out share a lower overall feeling of safety on campus (GLSEN, 2013) than LGBTQ students who are

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<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, I was unable to collect enough data for my survey results to be generalizable. Please see Chapters 5 and 6 for a discussion of my survey data.

not out. I address the following questions through examining the experiences of LGBTQ students who are out on campus at a primarily white institution in the South:

- (1) How do Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning (LGBTQ) students who are out experience the campus climate at Southern Research University?
  - a. How do LGBTQ students who are “out” describe their lives at Southern Research University?
  - b. When applying GLSEN’s climate study domains, do students who are “out” report different experiences compared to students who are closeted? What are those differences?
  - c. How do LGBTQ students’ experiences reported in the focus groups complement or contrast LGBTQ students’ experiences captured in the survey responses?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Researchers who study LGBT issues in higher education have found that LGBTQ students on university campuses suffered from high levels of victimization and harassment, and that LGBTQ students, who were out, suffered from these instances more often than those who were closeted (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003). According to Gortmaker and Brown (2006) and Rankin (2003), students who were out reported also higher incidents of negative experiences with school staff. In Gortmaker and Brown’s (2006) study, 17% of LGBTQ students who identified as out reported harassment from school administrators, faculty, and staff, compared to 0% of closeted students. All LGBT students (out and not) reported that hiding their L, G, B, and/or T

identity from faculty was a necessity. Neither Gortmaker and Brown (2006) nor Rankin (2003) have conducted research in the South. My study will assist in filling the gap about LGBTQ student experiences at IHEs in the South.

As I mentioned above, Southern Research University is a PWI. According to Carter (2013), most research concerning LGBT students has been conducted at PWIs. In my own review of the literature, often researchers did not identify an IHE as a PWI. Researchers who mentioned explicitly a PWI descriptor addressed the intersection of race and minority sexual identity (Carter, 2013; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Rankin, 2003; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Rhoads, 1994). As such in Chapter 2, I address literature about both IHEs and IHEs that researchers identified as PWIs.

Finding literature concerning LGBT individuals coming out and being out in the South proved to be incredibly difficult. It would appear that there is a large gap in the literature concerning LGBTQ populations in the South. My study addresses the lack of literature about LGBTQ college student experiences in the South. I hope to add to the existing knowledge base in LGBT Studies.

At an institutional level, it is my hope that I might be able to use data from this study to influence policy change and decision-making at SRU. While climate studies have been completed in the past in other locations across the nation, at other IHEs, and in other schools in the South (GLSEN 2011; Rankin, 2003; Tretreault et al., 2013), a climate study has never been done at Southern Research University (LGBT Resource Center, personal communications, September 2, 2014). In 2013, I attempted to conduct a LGBT climate study with the assistance of the director of LGBT Resource Center at SRU.

Active resistance on the part of SRU's chief diversity officer (CDO) prevented us from doing so. I examine that resistance in greater detail in Chapter 3.

## **1.6 Limitations**

The quantitative portion of my study is limited by the fact that it is impossible to know just how many students identify as LGBTQ at SRU. According to studies conducted by the Williams Institute (Gates, 2011) in 2011, approximately 3.5% of the adult population in the United States identified as LBG and 0.3% identify as transgender. The report noted as well that 8.2% of U.S. citizens reported having engaged in same-sex sexual behavior, and that 11% of U.S. citizens reported feeling at least some same-sex sexual attraction. As is evident in these numbers, sexuality is a difficult concept to define, as many people report feeling same-sex attraction, but do not identify as L, G, B, T, or Q. Further, there is no exact number for just how many individuals identify as L, G, B, T, or Q in any given place. Because of the differences in reporting identification as L, G, B, or T and same-sex sexual attraction and behavior, calculating an exact sample size is not possible. While 3.5% of the adult population may seem relatively low, the application of this estimate to SRU's student population is approximately 1,000 students. SRU has an enrollment size of over 27,000 (Southern Research University Admissions Website, 2015). Finally, I must consider the possibility of out or closeted students who may not answer the survey honestly.

Qualitatively, it was not difficult to find individuals who were willing to discuss their experiences relating to sexuality. The only difficulty I encountered in coordinating the focus groups was that some participants were not available to meet in person, because they were not in the area for the summer. Because of interest, I chose to hold one focus

group online via Google Hangouts. This format for conducting a focus group had its own difficulties and limitations, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

### **1.7 Dissertation Layout**

Following this introduction, in Chapter 2 I provide the conceptual framework of my research and my review of the literature on coming out. I discuss methodology in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4 I include my qualitative analysis from focus groups, and in Chapter 5 I include my quantitative data analyses from the campus climate survey. I then synthesize my findings in a discussion in Chapter 6 and offer implications and conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2:

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, first I discuss the field of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) studies. Doing so provides context for studies concerning LGBT populations. Second, I discuss the theorists who inform my understanding of LGBT issues. Third, I represent and synthesize the literature relevant to campus climates in institutions of higher education (IHEs) and coming out<sup>7</sup>. Specifically, I address LGBT experiences and campus climate at IHEs and coming out/being out at IHEs. Finally, I discuss the six domains that GLSEN (2013) used to examine campus climate. Through these efforts, I hope to illuminate the ways the knowledge gained from my research may contribute to current literature on LGBTQ student experience in IHEs.

#### **2.1 Histories and Origins of LGBT Studies**

LGBT studies is a field made up of multiple disciplines (e.g., anthropology, sociology, psychology) (Shuuf & Sandfort, 2000; Weeks, 2000). Weeks (2000) argued that there was often a shared direction of study within these disciplines.

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<sup>7</sup> Mayo (2007) defined being out as when an individual “self-consciously and publicly identifies” as a member of a sexual minority group” (p. 82).

Obviously, there are common themes and there is a lot of coming together at various times. The object of study has to a large extent often been the lives of lesbian and gay people themselves: identities, experience of oppression, struggles for recognition, through history and in literature and so on. But we are also concerned with other things outside that, from legal codes to cultural representation, defining parts of lived life, certainly, but developing modes of interpretation and audiences that are often distinctive, and throw stark light on heterosexuality as much as homosexuality. (Weeks, 2000, p. 2)

As a field, LGBT studies is deeply entwined with political events surrounding LGBTQ individuals and the pursuit of LGBTQ rights (Shuuf & Sandfort, 2000; Weeks, 2000).

Weeks (2000) explained,

[T]here is a common political root to lesbian and gay studies. Its origins lie in the new lesbian and gay movements as they emerged in the early 1970s. All those involved would claim some affinity in a commitment to sexual justice, greater legal and social equality for non-heterosexual people, and in a willingness to be identified as lesbian and gay in the academy. (p. 4)

He continued to state “politics in a broad sense is inescapably part of lesbian and gay studies” (p. 6). According to Weeks (2000), the field of LGBT studies developed from the need to question and critique existing knowledge about homosexuality and to better define what was known about homosexuality.

In 1989 the first LGBT Studies department was established at the City College of San Francisco’s (CCSF) (City College of San Francisco, 2015). Slowly, over the years the number of LGBT Studies programs in the United States has grown. Currently,



according to the College Equity Index, four universities offer an undergraduate major in LGBT or queer studies, 28 offer an undergraduate minor in LGBT or queer studies, and 25 offer either courses in LGBT or queer studies or a graduate or undergraduate certificate (College Equity Index, 2015).

The growth of LGBT Studies programs and departments was not without resistance. In 1991 the United States Congress instructed individuals within the National Endowments for the Humanities and the Arts to ban funding to any researchers studying LGBT issues (Abelove et al., 1993; Library of Congress, 2015). The clause was included in the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1991, which the House of Representatives passed. Ultimately, the Senate removed the language used to ban funding for LGBTQ issues before the act was passed (Accessed via the Library of Congress, January 7, 2015).

According to Herriot, Hayes, and Rice (2005), the women's movement contributed to the development of LGBT studies. Many feminist theorists examined the lives and experiences of LGBT people. During the 1960s and 1970s feminist theorists expanded the field of research on LGBT issues. Large numbers of lesbian and gay people were coming out, and these researchers increased interest in LGBT identities as a cultural and sociological group. The amount of research and number of publications reflecting LGBT issues grew as a result of the work by feminist theorists, and the *Journal of Homosexuality* appeared in 1976.

In the 1990s a new generation of scholars emerged in response to the AIDS epidemic. Researchers studied LGBTQ individuals in particular (Herriot, Hayes, & Rice, 2005). Many researchers pursued work with LGBTQ populations during the AIDS

epidemic in order to challenge misunderstandings that surrounded the disease; such as the misconception that AIDS was a disease that only gay men contracted (Meyer, 1991;

Yingling, 1991). Yingling (1991) posited that,

[AIDS] can be apprehended – on bodies, in friends, in news reports, in changing populations, behaviors, and rituals: we know that it is in some undeniable sense, ‘real,’ whether its reality be outside or within us. But the frames of intelligibility that provide it with even a meager measure of comprehensibility are notoriously unstable. This is evident not only on the macropolitical level, where intense battles over the meaning of AIDS have accompanied every stage of research and treatment in the history of the disease, but also on the micropolitical level, down to the level of the everyday... The gap between the apprehension and the comprehension of the disease is thus an asymptotic space where allegory persistently finds itself at play and where the ongoing histories in which AIDS unfolds (variously comprised of the viral, the personal, the communal, the national, and the global) are referred to larger and more masterful or authoritative histories that guarantee interpretation of its meanings and restabilizes (sometimes ironically) those values it places at risk. (p. 292)

Yingling described the “frames of intelligibility” regarding AIDS as “notoriously unstable.” He argued that research became out dated as soon as it was published.

Research on AIDS and about the people affected by it grew rapidly. Some researchers started to use their research as a tool for social justice – working to dispel misconceptions about who could contract HIV and to humanize individuals who identified as homosexuals.

## 2.2 Theorists who Inform my Work

In this section, I examine select works from theorists who inform my reading of the literature, my belief system, and my positionality. All three of these theorists, Judith Butler, Audre Lorde, and Eve Sedgwick were women who contributed greatly to the field of LGBT studies and Queer Studies.

According to Meyer (2012) and Turner (2003), many scholars use LGBT studies and Queer Studies interchangeably. Mayo (2007) posited that researchers within the field of LGBT studies focused primarily on making institutions more accountable to LGBTQ students. Researchers in Queer Studies and LGBT Studies examined dominant discourse and how language and meaning could change. Queer Studies and LGBT Studies differed in scope. Queer theory included more than just issues of sexuality and gender. Queer theorists studied dominant discourses across multiple domains in society. Turner (2003) also argued that queer theory had been used in many other domains as a means to upset balance within other studies, such as in the study of Black popular culture.

**2.2.1 Judith Butler.** Butler revolutionized the way many understand gender. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), she described gender as performatively constituted. For Butler, gender served as a verb, not a noun. Gender was what individuals did (i.e. performed) at certain times in certain contexts. Gender (performative) did not constitute necessarily sex (biological). Nor did sex necessarily constitute gender. Butler (1988) argued that,

[G]ender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted

through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 519)

I have interpreted this to mean that individuals reinforce their own beliefs about gender through their performances. According to Butler (1990), an individual's personal identity was shaped by her or his gender performances. Butler examined what performativity of gender meant in relationship to heterosexuality, homosexuality, sex, and gender identity. For example, she argued that within lesbian contexts, an 'identification' with masculinity that appeared as butch was not a simple assimilation of lesbianism back into heterosexuality. For example,

As a lesbian femme explained, she likes her boys to be girls, meaning that 'being a girl' contextualizes and resignifies 'masculinity' in a butch identity. As a result, that masculinity, if that it can be called, is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible 'female body.' It is precisely this dissonant juxtaposition and the sexual tension that its transgression generates that constitute the object of desire. In other words, the object (and clearly, there is not just one) of lesbian-femme desire is neither some decontextualized female body nor a discrete yet superimposed masculine identity, but the destabilization of both terms as they come into erotic interplay. (p. 123)

Butler described the (incorrect) ascriptions of heterosexual roles to homosexual performance and desire.

The idea that butch and femme are in some sense "replicas" or "copies" of heterosexual exchange underestimates the erotic significance of these identities as

internally dissonant and complex in their resignification of the hegemonic categories by which they are enabled (p. 123).

Butler rejected the heteronormative binaries that restricted identity, identification, and desire to predisposed categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, and man/woman.

Her work is important to me because I have grown up in a society that embraces heteronormative binaries. After reading Butler's work I started working through the binaries under which my own thinking was structured. I still catch myself falling into binary thought categories sometimes but constantly work to queer my understanding of whatever the topic is at hand – to break it apart and examine it. I do so to work against the dominance of binary constructions of gender, gender roles, and desire. This affects my study by complicating my understanding of topics such as gender and sexual identities, of which I have provided multiple options on the survey in order to assure that I am not trapping respondents within a heteronormative binary. I also see outness as a process that is not represented within the binary of being out or closeted, instead I argue it is important to examine the many different ways and spaces in which individuals may be out. Due to this understanding of outness, I asked survey respondents to indicate how out they are on a scale from 1-6.

**2.2.2 Audre Lorde.** Audre Lorde (1984; 1988), who was a part of the Combahee River Collective (1982), first insisted that interlocking identities (such as race and sexuality) should be examined and utilized in combination when fighting against gender based and racial oppression (Combahee River Collective, 1982; Lorde, 1984; 1988; Mayo, 2014). The Combahee River Collective (1982) described their mission by stating,

The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face. (p. 1)

Lorde, along with the Combahee River Collective, argued that one cannot separate identities in the examination of oppression. Instead, she posited that interlocking oppressions form a larger context in which an individual who is oppressed will continue to be oppressed (Combahee River Collective, 1982; Lorde, 1984; 1988). For example, a Black lesbian woman is oppressed by her status as a racial minority, a sexual minority, and as a woman. Other interlocking oppressions may exist due to her class or religious identity.

In her essay *The Erotic as Power*, Lorde (1978) argued that women have suppressed their own personal power because men have delegitimized their power. She argued that,

The erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered

source of power and information within our lives... As women, we have come to distrust the power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide life-giving substance for their masters. (Lorde, 1978, p. 53-54).

Lorde discussed how members of society (and women in particular) were taught to suppress sensuality, and therefore, doubt their internal emotional perspectives as a credible lens for viewing society and forming knowledge. In viewing society through rationality alone (and restricting the significance of emotion), individuals have ignored their sensual sides. Lorde described emotion-centered knowledge as “nonrational knowledge” (p. 56). She argued that fear surrounds “nonrational knowledge,” because men have labeled it “emotional,” “confused,” and “trivial” (p. 54). Historically, men situated women as inferior producers of power, through their delegitimization of women’s knowledge. However, Lorde argued that embracing erotic power, individuals were better able to scrutinize the world and the systems of oppression within it.

“The erotic,” Lorde contended, “cannot be felt secondhand” (p. 59). Each individual must break from the “European-American” male tradition of rationality and connect with her or his deepest self in order to understand her or his own erotic power.

Young (2012) argued that Lorde’s work could be connected to the field of LGBT studies. In research on LGBT issues, Lorde’s emphasis on “embodiment” as “a legitimate

lens through which one can gain deeper understanding” and “understanding through experiences and the materiality of the body, [and] ... the erotic is key” (p. 305). Young claimed that Lorde’s belief in the saliency of one’s own experiences should not be discounted. Young explained that Lorde believed that individuals must accept that their experiences and feelings were no less real than anything else they observed. Individuals must realize these truths in order to truly actualize their power of the erotic. Lorde and Rich (1981) insisted that historically individuals had been taught to question what was within themselves and to repress the self as a source of knowledge.

Lorde’s work is important to my work and me personally, because her ideas have greatly affected my ontological and epistemological standpoints. I have been socialized to doubt my innermost knowledge. I began to resist the dominance of rational knowledge when I entered my current doctoral program. Now I experience “nonrational knowledge” as significant and meaningful as well as rational knowledge. Methodologically, I see nonrational knowledge as something that exists outside positivism. Wanting to honor the value of Lorde’s nonrational knowledge, I chose a research design that privileges lived experience as well as quantitative data collection. I research now with a viewpoint against claims of fact and monolithic experiences. As such, in this study I am open to the information participants share, rational or nonrational as I sought understandings of their everyday embodied experiences.

**2.2.3 Eve Sedgwick.** In my opinion, Sedgwick has conducted pioneering and influential work in LGBT studies and queer theory. In her work *The Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick (1990) attempted to,



[D]emonstrate that categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions—heterosexual/homosexual, in this case—actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation according to which, first, term B is not symmetrical with but subordinated to term A; but, second, the ontologically valorized term A actually depends for its meaning on the simultaneous submission and exclusion of term B; hence, third, the question of priority between the supposed central and the supposed marginal category of each dyad is irresolvably unstable, an instability caused by the fact that term B is constituted as at once internal and external to term A. (p. 9-10)

These “symmetrical binary oppositions” (p. 9) are problematic for Sedgwick. For example (and perhaps most appropriately for my study), Sedgwick described the dualism between homosexuality and heterosexuality as a particularly troublesome binary. She argued that two halves failed to constitute a whole. She critiqued individuals who defined the identity of “heterosexual” in opposition to “homosexual”. She explained that the term “heterosexual” entered into vocabulary after the word “homosexual” (p. 2). Sedgwick argued that individuals who think in identity-based dualisms eliminate their own ability to conceive of and practice complex identities. Using these identity-based dualisms to inform thought limited an individual’s freedom through forcing her or him to see identities as an either/or. Sedgwick argued that people are different, and that the most vilifying of these differences was often sexuality.

In her work Sedgwick discussed being out versus being closeted as a false binary. She argued that,

[T]he deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure. Even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn't know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important... The gay closet is not a feature only of the lives of gay people. But for many gay people it is still the fundamental feature of social life; and there can be few gay people, however courageous and forthright by habit, however fortunate in the support of their immediate communities, in whose lives the closet is not still a shaping presence. (p. 68)

Sedgwick's work on the false binary of being out or being closeted affected my research in two ways. Her ideas changed the way that I understand identities and sexualities. Sedgwick posited that identities are not static binaries, and that individuals may live outside socially accepted categories. I see my own sexual identity in Sedgwick's work, as I do not identify as heterosexual or LGBTQ – an issue that I will go into more detail about in Chapter 3. Sedgwick first challenged my understanding of being out as being an either/or. This change affects the way I prepare to facilitate my focus groups and interpret my survey data. I invited participants to talk me through the complexity of outness and constructed survey items about outness on varying scales. I offered, too, gender options

outside the standard female and male choices on the survey, such as “gender queer,” and “non-gender conforming.” I provided an option where participants could write in their own gender identity, too, if they did not identify with one of the given options.

In ‘Christmas Effects,’ Sedgwick (2012) discussed the multiple uses of the word “queer.” Though the word is used often (even by Sedgwick herself) to refer to sexual preference or sexuality, researchers have used “queer” to classify many other concepts. To “queer” something, as a verb, may mean to deconstruct it, and examine it in a new light or to question it further. Concurrently, researchers and theorists have used the word ‘queer’ to describe the interrelationships within identities based on race, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. According to Sedgwick through these uses, “queer” has evolved into a term of exploration rather than derision.

Sedgwick’s work on the term “queer” informs my work by forcing me see the word “queer” deployed and utilized in multiple and important ways. As I was growing up, I only ever heard “queer” used in a derogatory manner. However, in speaking with many of my LGBTQ friends and after reading Sedgwick’s work, I have come to embrace the term and its multifacetedness.

### **2.3 Coming Out, Youth Experiences**

In this section, I describe the current literature surrounding coming out. To be “out”, according to Mayo (2007), meant to “self-consciously and publicly identify as a member of a sexual minority group” (p. 82). “Being out” is not a static status. To whom one may be out and when one may come out depends on the space, time, relationships, and each individual circumstance (GLSEN 2013; Mayo, 2007; Rankin, 2003). For some Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ) identified

individuals being out means becoming political (Rhoads, 1994) and/or actively working to disrupt the status quo (Mayo, 2007).

In this section I represent and synthesize existing literature on the coming out experience of LGBTQ individuals. Due to my interest in the experiences of LGBTQ students at Southern Research University, I examine the experiences of students and youth in my study of the literature<sup>8</sup>. My review of the applicable literature for this study consists of two distinct areas (1) the experiences of coming out for k-12 students, and (2) the experiences of coming out for postsecondary students.

**2.3.1 Experiences of Coming Out for K-12 Students.** According to recent research, LGBTQ youth reported becoming aware of and disclosing their sexual preferences and gender identities at young ages, (D’Augelli 2003; D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2008; Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009; Grov et al. 2007; Pinar, 1998). In 2003, D’Augelli found through survey research that lesbian and bisexual participants reported coming out at young ages, between 11-16. After coming out, participants communicated higher levels of victimization than from before they were out.

In 2008 D’Augelli, Grossman, and Starks found similar results. The researchers surveyed 528 LGB youth, and found that males reported first becoming aware of their same-sex attraction by age 12, and females reported first becoming aware of their same-sex attraction at 13. Both males and females shared that they identified as LGB at an average age of 14. They came out at 15. The researchers discussed anti-LGBT

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<sup>8</sup> I find it worth noting that there is a rich library of literature concerning teachers who choose to come out (e.g., Ferfolja & Hopkins, 2013; Gray, 2013; Paparo & Sweet, 2014; Taylor, 2011)

discrimination, specifically the negative effects of physical and verbal harassment on children.

Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, and Howell (2009) documented the same phenomena. In focus groups with 30 youth from an LGBT youth community group, 17 youth reported coming out between the ages of 14 and 16, and nine youth reported coming out between the ages of 11 and 13. After coming out participants shared that they felt a lack of community, agency, and support within their schools. Further, the female and transgender participants communicated that they lacked role models and mentors in their lives. All participants conferred their awareness of and disappointment about negative portrayals of LGBT individuals in the media. Similar to Grossman et al.'s research, in my own study I examine perceptions surrounding community, agency and support for LGBTQ students and LGBTQ how students who are out experience victimization and harassment.

Through survey research Grov, Bimbi, Nain, and Parsons (2006) found that self-actualization and self-identification of sexual identities occurred at similar ages for LGBTQ children and non-LGBTQ peers. The researchers reported that male participants recounted self-identifying and coming out at younger ages than female participants. However, the researchers did not explore why the difference occurred. They documented also that for youth of color, self-identifying as LGB followed self-identification with racial roles. Grov et al. did not examine further the comparison between racial identification and LGB identification, though they theorized that racial identities were stronger than sexual identities.

***Surviving victimization.*** According to D’Augelli (2003; et al. 2008), after the often-painful process of self-identification occurred, the process of disclosure as L, G, B, T, and/or Q was equally as painful for youth. Typically, disclosing sexual identity meant experiencing higher levels of victimization. This victimization increased after coming out, often continuing throughout all of one’s lifetime, including during one’s school years.

Researchers have documented harassment perpetrated by elementary school students against their peers based on known or assumed sexuality (D’Augelli, 2003; D’Augelli et al., 2007; Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2009). Many LGBT youth throughout primary and secondary schooling reported an overabundance of negative experiences, including being the target of hate speech, being physically harassed, being on the receiving end of microaggressions, and being excluded from school activities and communities (D’Augelli et al., 2008; Grossman, Haney, Edwards, Alessi, Ardon, & Howell, 2009; Nadal, Issa, Leon, Meterko, Wideman, & Wong, 2011).

Researchers at GLSEN (2012) found that victimization increased for those youth who were out. According to surveys conducted by GLSEN (2012) and Nichols, (1999), many students decided not to come out due to the threat of harassment and assault. In GLSEN’s 2011 school climate survey, researchers examined how being out affected respondents. I felt disheartened by the results. Of the respondents, 16% of those youth who reported not being out experienced victimization based on assumed sexual orientation. About 32% of those youth who were out experienced victimization compared to their peers. When it came to school staff, 22.5% of students who were not out to staff reported victimization. However, 35.2% of those who were out to school staff

experienced victimization (GLSEN, 2012). Researchers at GLSEN (2012) argued that k-12 faculty and staff could decrease incidents of victimization by holding accountable individuals who bullied students based on perceived or known sexuality or gender identity.

In Poteat, Espelage, and Koenig's (2009) survey-based study, researchers found that many non-LGBT students were uncomfortable with the idea of a friend or peer coming out, and many non-LGBT students would have rather attended a school where there were no LGBT individuals. The researchers found also that younger students were less likely than their older counterparts to accept LGBT peers, and that boys were less likely than girls to accept LGBT peers. It is no surprise to me that LGBT youth have reported being worried about coming out with this kind of anti-LGBT harassment and discrimination between students and their peers in our schools (D'Augelli, 2003; GLSEN, 2012). In this study, I searched for information concerning whether or not my participants felt as though they were welcomed on campus. In the future, I would like to study heterosexual students' perceptions of LGBTQ peers in IHEs. I think it would be interesting to look for the connections between Poteat et al.'s findings and postsecondary students.

***When faculty and staff are not supportive.*** In Grossman et al.'s (2009) study, LGB students reported a lack of community, agency, and support in their secondary schools. They shared that they felt like faculty and staff failed to do anything about the harassment or exclusivity the students faced. Through the focus groups Grossman et al. conducted, multiple participants discussed the way heterosexual students treated them.

The participants explained that heterosexual students treated them as if they were a “different species.” Heterosexual harassment included,

Name-calling, hate speech, harassment, and sometimes physical violence.

Without assistance from teachers, administrators, and security guards, which they received rarely, the LGBT youth stated that there had been an absence of mastery that would enable them to effect any change in their situations. (p. 32)

Participants reported feeling so little agency that they did not even report harassment to school administrators, faculty, or parents, stating that they were worried no one would take them seriously or punish the students who were bullying them. Similarly, participants in GLSEN’s (2012) national climate study shared that they felt as though faculty and staff would not take their complaints seriously. I expected that participants in my survey would indicate that they were not comfortable reporting experiences of harassment due to doubts that faculty, staff, university officials will take them seriously, as I have had LGBTQ friends share similar feelings with me in the past. However, this point was not found within the data.

Through conducting a national longitudinal survey Kosciw, Bartkiewicz, and Greytak (2012) found that use of derogatory speech related to sexuality has decreased since 1999; however, negative remarks about gender expression have slightly increased. It is important to note that while the decrease in derogatory language based on sexuality is something I celebrate, more than half of students in this longitudinal survey still reported hearing hate speech (Kosciw, Bartkiewicz, & Greytak, 2012). This study did not examine why these changes occurred—such an addition would strengthen Kosciw et al’s research.



While conducting professional development for secondary teachers, Jones (2012) found that many participants reported that the words “fag,” “gay,” and “queer” (p. 9) did not refer exclusively to sexuality. Jones (2012) stated that,

[F]or example, [secondary teachers] believed that some students may call someone else a ‘fag’ and not be referring to her or his sexuality, but rather are making a statement similar to ‘you’re an idiot’ or ‘you’re stupid.’ Thus, most participants acknowledged that they did not address students’ use of the word ‘fag’ when used in their classrooms. (p. 9)

Jones worked to address these actions as homophobic, and used the professional development sessions to increase awareness and tolerance of LGBTQ student populations for the teachers who participated.

Anti-LGBT harassment and discrimination is not limited to the United States. DePalma and Atkinson (2009) conducted interviews with high school faculty and staff, and completed a content analysis from online faculty and staff discussions in a secondary school in the United Kingdom. Their findings included the following rationale: some teachers felt that passively “tolerating” homosexuality was enough, that there was no need to support or celebrate LGBT students. Such passive tolerance engendered environments that allowed LGBT and questioning students still to feel invisible and unseen. In their discussion, DePalma and Atkinson suggested that teachers focus more on challenging heteronormative practices rather than validate one group of people (heterosexuals) over others, instead of just focusing on eliminating hate speech.

Eliminating hate speech is a difficult battle in the United States; as I noted in Jones’s (2012) study earlier in this chapter, many teachers still feel as if words such as

“fag” have nothing to do with sexuality. I have taught pre-service teachers over the past three years, and have heard many of them repeat that words like “fag” have nothing to do with homosexuality. Because of this, I expected to find that participants in this dissertation to share their experiences with hearing biased language from faculty on campus. This was indeed found within the focus group data, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010) conducted a mixed methods study utilizing a survey and focus groups to examine the experiences of transgender middle and high school students across California. The researchers found that transgender students were more likely to report gender-based harassment (82%) than LGB students (60%). Also, transgender students were less likely to report teacher or administrator intervention (25%) than LGB students (45%). Transgender students expressed strong messages of feeling unsafe at school and shared that teachers failed to intervene when fights started. For example, one transgender participant shared that teachers “feel they don’t even get paid enough” to break up a fight. “They don’t want to get hit in the process,” he said. The students shared, too, through the survey that faculty, staff, and administrators participated in harassment. One teacher, however, was “different.” In a focus group a participant told the researchers about a teacher who was supportive. He said:

I had a teacher, she was different though. She was like aware. She didn’t play that...she didn’t tolerate none of that. And like if she ever saw fighting or anything, or whatever, people calling people a name she wouldn’t have it. But that

was rare... That's the only one that ever...like that one teacher. You know. (p. 1183)

***Creating a more positive environment through school personnel.*** GLSEN (2012) used annual surveys targeted toward understanding school climates for LGBT students and found that climates have been improving slowly in schools where faculty and administration have actively worked to better the climate for LGBT students. School personnel who supported LGBTQ students contributed to an LGBTQ-student's sense of belonging (GLSEN, 2012; Pace, 2004; Payne & Smith, 2010; Quasha, McCabe, College, & Ortiz, 2014). During focus group interviews, I asked participants about where they feel celebrated and nurtured on campus. The language of this question was met with mixed feelings from participants, though positive experiences were shared throughout all three focus groups. Please see Chapter 4 for an exploration of their reactions.

Quasha, McCabe, College, and Ortiz (2014) surveyed faculty members at two middle schools, one with a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) and one without. Participants at the middle school with a GSA reported less hate speech, intolerance, and unfair treatment toward LGBTQ students than the school without the GSA. The GSA provided helpful, supportive spaces for students who identified as L, G, B, T, or Q. According to Quasha et al. (2014) and GLSEN (2012), GSAs can serve in educating the school community (faculty, staff, and students) about issues concerning LGBTQ students. GSAs are important because they are able to contribute to positive school climates, as these spaces allow for LGBTQ students to feel supported (GLSEN 2012; Quasha et al., 2014). The LGBTQ student organization on campus at SRU is large and very active. Focus group participants and survey respondents shared positive experiences within this organization.

Pace (2004) conducted a case study with a student in a rural setting who came out in a small, rural town that Pace or the student likened to “Mayberry.” (p. 14). “Pete” found a lot of support when coming out to his small group of friends, and later overheard rumors amongst his peers swirling about whom he would take to prom. These rumors made him feel as though peers in his school were interested in his life. Additionally, Pete benefitted greatly from supportive school personnel, which Pace argued was one of the most important aspects of maintaining a positive climate. While Pete’s story was very interesting, I would be interested to hear from more students in the same school on their opinions about his coming out, or from others who have come out or considered coming out. Doing so might provide a more in-depth understanding of the ways support at “Mayberry” school was deployed.

Pace (2004) argued for the importance of accepting school staff in his study, but he discussed also the importance of schools properly training staff for working with LGBT students. Similarly, Payne and Smith (2010) insisted that LGBT training was significant. They argued that training about LGBT students should occur annually, because teachers and staff needed review to remain effective in annihilating stigma amongst students. In their study, Payne and Smith found that faculty members communicated more positive experiences for their LGBTQ students following professional development when compared to prior reporting. The increase in reporting meant that teachers felt as though these professional development activities were useful in reinforcing what they had previously learned about working with LGBTQ populations. I wish that Payne and Smith had instead surveyed students about their experiences before and after faculty members went through professional development activities, as I worry

that teachers would answer more positively on surveys without actually knowing what these students experience on a personal level<sup>9</sup>.

***Positives and negatives of coming out.*** For students, coming and being out can be a double-edged sword. In the *2011 School Climate Report*, GLSEN (2012) found that “LGBT students who were out to their peers and school staff reported higher levels of victimization based on their sexual identity and gender expression, but also higher school belonging and self-esteem” (p. 39). GLSEN’s survey instrument inspired me to adapt it for this study.

One example of a study with mixed findings, both negative and positive experiences of being out was Robinson’s (2010) interview study with high school students. Robinson interviewed gay and lesbian secondary students and found a theme that those who came out in school reported more positive experiences with their peers after doing so. One student said that his peers treated him better after coming out. He believed that his fellow students felt more uncomfortable not knowing his identity. Devastatingly, participants in Robinson’s study shared that teachers and staff members outed them against their will. Teachers and staff members shared with others students’ L, G, B, T, and/or Q identities without student consent. Kretz (2003) stated “such outings by school officials – whether they be teachers, staff, or administrators – are still relatively rare, but can often have harmful results for the student whose confidentiality has been breached” (p. 381). Outing someone against their will can be harmful for myriad of

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<sup>9</sup> I am referring to social desirability bias from self-report surveys (e.g., Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; DeVellis, 2003; Paulhaus 1984). Miller (2012) argued “if there is reason to believe that questions on a survey will prompt respondents to answer untruthfully in an attempt to provide a social appropriate response, researchers may want to explore the potential presence of social desirability bias” (p. 30).

reasons, such as (though not limited to) harassment from their fellow peers, harassment from school staff, or parental disapproval and negative family dynamics.

In an in-depth interview study with high school students who identified as lesbians Payne (2007), documented only negative experiences. The researcher found that all three of his participants recalled negative experiences from peers and teachers at their schools after they came out. In one student's story, the track coach kicked the student off the track team because he did not agree with homosexuality. Faculty and guidance counselors failed to respond to complaints and concerns shared with them by the other two participants. One participant reported getting into disciplinary trouble because she said the word "bastard" to a boy who was part of a group yelling "faggot" and "I've got AIDS" in a mocking manner while acting as though he were gay. The boys were not disciplined (Payne 2007). This constitutes verbal harassment, and I have examined focus group participant and survey respondent experiences with verbal harassment and reporting harassment in my study in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. This study frustrated me, as these three students reported difficulty after coming out. I think this study's inclusion is important, because the findings serve to counterbalance studies that reflect positive results in coming out stories.

Nadal, Issa, Leon, Meterko, Wideman, & Wong, (2011) conducted focus groups with 26 college students in a public university who were enrolled in introductory psychology classes to examine the effects of "sexual orientation microaggressions" (p. 234). Nadal et al. (2011) defined microaggressions as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults toward members of

oppressed groups” (p. 235). The researchers identified eight themes across the focus group data (1) heterosexist terminology, (2) affirmation of heteronormative culture, (3) assumptions of a universal LGBT experience, (4) exoticization, (5) disapproval or discomfort of LGBT experience, (6) denial of the existence of heterosexism, (7) assumption of sexual abnormality, and (8) threatening behaviors. Heterosexual peers were guilty of both covert and overt microaggressions.

As I noted when I referenced work by both Butler (1988; 1990) and Sedgwick (1990) earlier in this chapter, binary thinking is a dangerous way to frame identity, identification, and desire. I believe that using binary categories of understanding coming out experiences is dangerous, too. Individuals interested in LGBTQ coming out experiences will benefit from complicating understandings of coming out experiences. Such experiences are neither wholly good nor bad. Studies suggest that the positive and negative points of coming out are largely dependent on the student’s support structures.

To summarize, researchers who examined the coming out experiences of LGBTQ youth have found that children were self-identifying and coming out as LGBTQ at younger ages than ever before (D’Augelli 2003; D’Augelli, et al., 2008; Grossman, et al., 2009; Grov et al. 2007; Pinar, 1998). Also, researchers found that LGBTQ students faced discrimination and both physical and verbal harassment due to their perceived or known sexuality (D’Augelli, 2003; D’Augelli et al., 2007; GLSEN 2012; Grossman et al., 2009; Kretz, 2003; Nadal et al., 2011; Payne, 2007; Poteat, et al., 2009). Other researcher documented that such hurtful events could be alleviated in part by having supportive school faculty and identity-based spaces (GLSEN 2012; Pace, 2004; Payne & Smith, 2010). However, harassment and discrimination also could worsen for LGBT students

when they were surrounded by unsupportive faculty and staff (GLSEN 2012; Jones, 2012; Payne, 2007; Robinson, 2010).

**2.3.2 Postsecondary Experiences.** In this section, I examine the experiences of LGBT students who are out while attending IHEs, specifically Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). First, I address research about coming out and being out in IHEs. Second, I address research about coming out and being out in the South. As the Southern Research University is a PWI in the South, I provide specific context for what other researchers have found in their studies, too.

***LGBTQ Students enrolled at IHEs.*** Unfortunately, in IHEs, much like the research about LGBT student in k-12 school settings, LGBT students, who were out to some or all of their social networks, experienced sexuality-based harassment at much higher rates than those students who were closeted (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003; Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Students enrolled at IHEs reported also higher incidents of negative experiences with school staff (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003).

In a study conducted by Gortmaker and Brown (2006), 17% of students who were out reported harassment from school administrators, faculty, and staff, when compared to only 2% of closeted students who experienced harassment from school administrators, faculty, and staff. All student participants, out or not, communicated that they felt staying closeted was necessary when dealing with faculty. However, Gortmaker & Brown argued that faculty who created an LGBT-friendly environment could improve LGBT student experience. I found that over 80% of survey respondents reported attempting to conceal



their sexual orientation on campus. Every focus group participant discussed this phenomenon as well. This theme is discussed in depth in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Similarly, Ritchie & Banning (2001) found that the establishment of resource offices directed toward LGB students improved student experience. The researchers conducted document analyses for eight LGBT Student Resource Offices (LGBTSROs) across the country in order to examine how they were established. They found that all resource offices encountered difficulties in becoming established due to strong political opposition. Difficulties included campus political resistance, funding challenges, and negotiating what kind support could be offered through an LGBTSRO. However, once LGBTSROs were established, the campus climate improved for LGBTQ students. When LGBTSROs had the support of faculty and staff on campus, staff encountered fewer difficulties.

Due to unsupportive faculty, staff, and peers, university campuses (similar to primary and secondary contexts) still exist as heterosexist spaces (Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Taulke-Johnson (2008) interviewed six men and completed narrative analysis on their stories about coming out at an IHE. The participants reported similar experiences to other studies – victimization, bullying, and anxiety surrounding coming out to friends and roommates. However, the researcher focused on the positive aspects of being gay on a campus. Participants shared that they were aware of the compulsory heterosexuality on campus but also communicated positive experiences. They shared they had great friends and made great connections with others on campus regardless of their sexuality. This study has influenced the way I am conducting my dissertation, because Taulke-Johnson

placed a lot of emphasis on the positive experiences of his participants. I asked questions about the positive and negative experiences in my study as to provide balance.

Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, and Magley (2008) conducted a survey with over 1,000 college students and found that almost half of all students, regardless of sexuality, reported hearing “heterosexist harassment” (p. 183) and “ambient harassment” (p. 183) on campus based on sexuality. Ambient harassment included hearing anti-LGBT discrimination, for example, in the form of jokes. Witnessing such discrimination constituted ambient harassment in Silverschanz et al.’s work. About 53% of LGBT participants reported hearing ambient harassment. All students who experienced directed and non-directed heterosexist harassment reported worse psychological and academic outcomes than those who did not. I found this study’s results compelling due to the study’s large sample size. In response to this research, I created an item to explore ambient harassment in the survey portion of my study.

Identity-based spaces on campus are places where LGBTQ students might receive support and assistance in gender identity development and disclosure (Renn 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). Renn (2007) studied students who were involved in LGBT groups on campus and who served as campus leaders. She found that LGBTQ students who were involved and provided campus leadership were more likely to be out when compared to other LGBTQ students. Students who were involved and provided campus leadership were more comfortable coming out to their families. She argued that the established support network the students had on campus made this possible. Students who were out shared that they felt less anxiety and depression than those who were not out (Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Renn, 2007). This finding is consistent with GLSEN’s (2012) research

about coming and being out in elementary and secondary contexts. I examined the spaces where LGBTQ participants feel celebrated and nurtured on campus in my design. Please see Chapters 4, 5, and 6 for discussions about these spaces.

Renn and Bilodeau (2005) conducted a case study in which they interviewed seven LGBT-identified undergraduate students who were involved in planning a large conference. Using a framework by D'Augelli (1994) they found that LGBT-identified student leaders experienced similar identity-based development stages as individuals without leadership roles.. While I am not interested in understanding the LGBTQ-identity development of the participants in my study, I found this study to be illuminating. The study informed my understanding of how LGBTQ identities and leadership roles interact. This study supported Renn's (2007) study, in which she examined campus leadership positions and LGBTQ students, too.

In a similar interview study, Rhoads (1994) found that LGBT college students coming out at an IHE often preceded their coming out at home. Participants reported having an easier time coming out to friends on campus than family back at home. Many students reported feeling relief after coming out. More than half (27 of 40) students reported coming out concurrent with becoming a political player on campus. One participant stated, "to be out is to be political and to let others, especially straight people, know that we exist" (p. 94). Participants connected being out/becoming political to resistance against heteronormativity. I found this political aspect of identity very interesting, because the connection really made me consider how powerful coming out and being out is – it is bravery in resistance to heteronormative assumptions.

Howard and Stevens (2000) documented 28 experiences of coming out with LGBT students in colleges across the nation. Coming out experiences vary slightly in these stories, but overall, many students shared the same types of experiences mentioned in other k-12 research. In contrast to more typical accounts, two interviews captured different experiences. Two female participants, who came out at small, all-female colleges, were met with support and joy from their peers. Other study participants, mostly enrolled at large IHEs shared that they faced violence, harassment and an absence of support from school administration and peers, when they came out. Students who were involved in student organizations communicated feeling more support in their on-campus environment after becoming involved with an LGBTSU. These findings reflect studies in k-12 environments, where many LGBTQ students faced discrimination and both physical and verbal harassment due to their perceived or known sexuality (D'Augelli, 2003; D'Augelli et al., 2007; GLSEN 2012; Grossman et al., 2009; Kretz, 2003; Nadal et al., 2011; Payne, 2007; Poteat, et al., 2009). Such pain may be partially alleviated by having supportive school faculty and identity-based spaces (GLSEN 2012; Pace, 2004; Payne & Smith, 2010).

Evans, Reason, and Broido (2001) examined LGB student experiences in residence halls at one university by interviewing 10 men and 10 women who identified as LGB. The researchers documented residence hall spaces as potentially dangerous spaces for LGB students. For example, having a negative home environment could lead to emotional and mental health issues, as an individual might not feel safe in her or his own home. Harassment from roommates could lead to negative situations, both internal (mental and emotional) and external (such as a room move, physical altercations, etc.).

The researchers interviewed a group of 20 university students through individual interviews and found that participants felt strongly that Resident Advisors (RAs) should be welcoming, supportive, and tolerant of homosexuality. Participants reported making positive connections with RAs who were LGB, too. Participants believed that peer relationships with all RAs helped them build networks, make connections, and find supportive places on campus.

In the same study, Evans et al. (2001) also studied LGBT students and residence life. The researchers found that participants who reported negative experiences with homophobic RAs felt negatively about residence life. Evans et al. argued that RAs who completed a safe zone or another training for allies were more likely to show tolerant and welcoming attitudes to LGBT students. Safe zone training and other training programs for allies often provide information about LGBTQ populations. Evans et al. did not provide information about the victimization experienced by the participants. Providing such information would have added to the balance in the study. Presently, all experiences seem positive as the journal article is written. I have asked questions about LGBTQ students' experiences and perceptions of residence hall life in the survey portion of my study.

***Education as intervention at IHEs*** In a survey that reached 397 undergraduate students, Kim, D'Andrea, and Sahu (1998) found that the more accurate an individual's knowledge was, the more positive her or his attitude toward homosexuality was. The researchers found that individuals who had accurate knowledge about homosexuality also had more positive attitudes toward their homosexual peers. Kim et al. demonstrated that Caucasian students were more knowledgeable about homosexuality than Japanese,

Chinese, and Filipino students, that students in education were more knowledgeable about homosexuality than students in business, and that female students who reported more masculine behaviors were more knowledgeable about homosexuality than those who reported more feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated behaviors. The purpose of the study was to examine the ways in which different identity markers (gender, sex, race, education) affected an individual's perceptions of homosexuality. I found that the possibility that educating heterosexual students about LGBTQ individuals might increase tolerance significantly, and that different intersections of identity may increase favorable ideals. Unfortunately, there were no Black students in this study, which I feel would be a very important racial identity to address in the South.

Lance (2008) found similar results in a mixed-methods longitudinal study he completed over the course of 30 years with students enrolled in his human sexuality course. Lance's research documented the effect of his course: students who had learned about sexuality in his course reported having more positive feelings about LGBT individuals. He hypothesized that education about how homosexuals and heterosexuals were similar would increase heterosexual tolerance and acceptance of LGBT individuals. His research supported his hypothesis. Lance discussed the need for legally sanctioned education about sexual minority populations, and mentioned that violent crimes against LGBT people across society have increased by 61% between the years 1992 and 2008. This statistic terrifies me, and inspired me to pursue this line of research even further.

In a survey of almost 2,000 respondents, Waldo (1998) found that heterosexual students who were white, male, and/or Christian reported more negative feelings about LGB students than those of other identity groupings. Further, LGB graduate students

reported more negative campus experiences than LGB undergraduate students. Both groups reported significantly more negative experiences than heterosexual students. This study yielded factors for me to consider when studying the way different demographic items work together in my survey.

To summarize, LGBTQ students who were enrolled at IHEs shared similar experiences with their k-12 counterparts. LGBTQ-identified students who were out experienced higher levels of sexuality based harassment than LGBT students who were closeted (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003; Silverschanz, et al., 2008; Taulke-Johnson, 2008). Both Identity-based spaces and supportive faculty and staff improved campus climates (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003; Ritchie & Banning, 2001; Silverschanz, et al., 2008; Taulke-Johnson, 2008) and involvement in campus leadership had positive effects on identity development and feelings of support for LGBT student who were out (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bolodeau, 2005). Importantly, education concerning sexual minorities positively influenced heterosexual students' perceptions of LGBTQ people (Kim et al., 1998; Lance, 2008; Waldo, 1998).

***Predominantly White Institutions.*** According to Carter (2013), most research concerning gay students has been conducted at PWIs. In my own experience preparing to write this section, I found it difficult to determine whether or not studies were conducted at PWIs, because often researchers did not mention racial demography. In this subsection, I have examined studies in which the researcher designated the IHE as a PWI. Most of these studies focus on the experiences of LGBTQ people of color. Mitchell and Means (2014) argued that finding literature concerning the experiences of being out as a gay

person of color in a PWI was difficult, as people of color struggled to find spaces which supported both intersecting identities.

Researchers have studied the interlocking oppressions students of color endure as LGBT students of color (Carter, 2013; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Rankin, 2003; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Rhoads, 1994). Not surprisingly, many LGBT students of color at PWIs experienced heterosexism and homophobia, just as many Black students experienced racism and prejudice at PWIs (Carter, 2013; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Rhoads, 1994; Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013).

In Rankin's (2003) national climate survey, she found that students of color often reported being uncomfortable with coming out when they attended a predominantly white institution and when they socialized in venues typically associated with people of color. Respondents discussed being oppressed "on two levels" (p. 25) – first by race in a white school context, and second by sexuality in a predominantly heterosexual school context. Rankin claimed to have conducted a national survey, but in reality only 14 of approximately 30 invited universities participated. Such a small sample size raises questions about the claim that Rankin's findings are nationally generalizable<sup>10</sup>. Interestingly, all 14 of the schools that participated had an LGBT student resource center on campus.

Strayhorn and Tillman-Kelly (2013) documented similar results in their study. The researchers conducted interviews with 29 gay Black men at PWIs. Their participants reported the lack of a support network containing other people of color and a lack of support from other males at the PWI (Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). The authors also found that gay Black male college students primarily construct masculinity in one of

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<sup>10</sup> The unit of analysis in this study was each IHE.



three ways; (1) performing traditionally masculine gender roles, (2) challenging hegemonic notions of Black masculinity, and (3) recognizing that their own masculine identities are an amalgamation of social factors. Feeling supported is imperative in succeeding in educational contexts, so I was disheartened by reading the results of this study. I hoped that by conducting a climate study at Southern Research University, I would be able to assist with identifying and rectifying those spaces on campus where LGBTQ individuals do not feel supported. I have analyzed a few spaces where LGBTQ students did not feel supported on campus. It is my intention to share this information with strategic individuals who may be able to assist in improving the climate of these spaces.

Carter (2013) interviewed 12 Black, gay male marching band members at different schools. His participants attended both PWIs and Historically Black Colleges (HBCs). He found that participants felt as though they were constantly renegotiating their identity. One participant from an HBC shared that the marching band shunned him once he came out during his senior year. In contrast, other participants from HBCs and PWIs shared experiences of acceptance from their band mates when they came out. They communicated that they felt accepted for the most part. For these participants who were a part of church congregations, coming out at their churches had not resulted in acceptance. I find it interesting that Carter (2013) had participants read, reflect on, and discuss works concerning historical issues for Black students before their interviews. I think that such reflection can be both beneficial and harmful; these students would gain insight on issues that people of color had experienced, which may contribute to their mental framework when considering their own lives and experiences. However, I think this could also be

harmful and bias the interviews and position the participants negatively during the interview. They may find themselves to be in a bad mood, or feel as though there are only negative aspects of being a Black student, as Carter only had participants read literature on historic issues.

In summary, the few studies I found on LGBT experiences of coming out at PWIs reported that Black LGBTQ students struggle with interlocking oppressions due to racial and sexual identities (Carter, 2013; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Rankin, 2013; Strayhorn & Tillman-Kelly, 2013). These studies informed my study by reminding me of the intricacies of race and other aspects of identity. I worked to keep all oppressed identities in mind in order to see the larger picture of how LGBTQ populations at SRU experience campus climate.

***The South.*** I had difficulty in finding literature concerning LGBT individuals coming out and being out in the South. Perhaps this should not be surprising given the religious and social conservatism of the South that I documented in Chapter 1. Researchers need to examine LGBT experiences in the South in order to address this gap in the literature.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the South is, indeed, populated by individuals with conservative values. Conservative religious teachings affect the populations who live in the region. Often such teachings influence every aspect of social life (Sears, 1991, 1992). Due to this culture of political and religious conservatism, the experiences of LGQ individuals have been full of tension in the South (Sears, 1991).

In his book, *Growing Up Gay in the South: Race, Gender, and Journey of the Spirit*, Sears (1991) presented narratives from 13 individuals who grew up in South

Carolina, a state Sears called “the epitome of the Old South” (p. 9). He argued that the examination of LGB experiences in the South was important, because often gay-identified southerners’ stories had been neglected in research. Throughout the narratives LGB participants described the ways they had to deal with strict conservatives who used the Church as rationale for their intolerance. Most of participants lost their relationships with their parents after coming out. One man who identified as gay shared that his father told him that being gay was the “result of some form of demonic possession” (p. 38). Throughout the book, each chapter is a different story as told by an LGBT individual from the South. All of these stories offer similar experiences with conservative Christianity and lost friends and familial relationships.

In another study published in the early 1990s by Sears (1992), Sears used mixed-methods research (survey and interviews) to examine the experiences of pre-service teachers in the South. In his previous work, Sears found that many participants had reported that teachers had expressed negative attitudes toward homosexuality and made unacceptable statements regarding homosexuality. Sears examined pre-service teachers’ attitudes concerning their prospective students, including LGBT students. Pre-service teacher participants were uncomfortable with the idea of working with LGBTQ students, and expressed many beliefs about how homosexuality was wrong (Sears, 1992). Because Sears completed this work in the early 1990s, I believe that the current literature would benefit greatly from another study similar to Sears’s with current pre-service teachers.

Conversely, a decade later, Dews and Law (2001) demonstrated through their interview study that LGBT individuals could carve out queer spaces in hostile environments. While the stories Dews and Law created from participant interviews were

compelling, the collection was not intended for scholarly review. I believe that stories are incredibly valuable though. When participants share their stories, they are thereby sharing what is real for them. Analytical engagement would have been helpful in order to understand what exactly it was that Dews and Law hoped that readers would gain while reading LGBT stories.

In 1997 Sears & Williams conducted an interview study with LGBTQ adults. They found that individuals who grew up in the South were more likely to harbor the belief that homosexuality was a learned or chosen trait than those who did not grow up in the South. The researchers reported that individuals living in the South were more likely to accept lesbians than gay men, too (a phenomena that was not examined further, to my dismay – I would like to know why lesbians were more acceptable than gay men). Additionally, they found that heterosexual men were less likely to accept LGBTQ individuals than heterosexual women.

In summary, the few studies I found on LGBT experiences of coming out in the South documented that the geographical area has a specific cultural experience that can be difficult for LGBTQ individuals to navigate when coming out. There are many religious and political conservatives whom can create a hostile environment for LGBTQ populations (Sears, 1991; 1992). Sears and Williams (1997) documented gender differences in the acceptance and tolerance of lesbians and gay men.

## **2.4 Campus Climates**

Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger, & Hope (2013) defined campus climate as the cumulative attitudes and behaviors of students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs. Examining campus climate is important,

as both academic and social success for LGBTQ students are grounded in the necessity for a healthy and affirming campus for LGBTQ students (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010). Many studies in the above section on coming out at IHEs in the U.S. included climate, so in this section I have examined a few studies more in-depth.

Rankin (1998, 2003, 2005, 2006; Rankin, Blumenfeld, Weber, & Frazer, 2010) has completed multiple studies examining LGBTQ students in IHEs. In her 2005 study, Rankin conducted a LGBT climate survey through 14 university campuses across the U.S. She concluded that 36% of LGBTQ undergraduate students experienced harassment on campus, 20% of LGBTQ students feared for their physical safety while on campus, and 51% of students concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity in order to avoid conflict on campus.

Woodford, Howell, Silverschanz, and Yu (2012) utilized campus climate data from a large-scale urban university to examine how biased language such as “that’s so gay” could negatively affect LGB students. LGB participants who heard biased language reported feeling left out on campus, a higher frequency of stomach problems, and a higher frequency of headaches than those who did not. Similarly, GLSEN (2013) found that exposure to biased language was associated with chilly campus climates, which I discuss in the next section of this review.

Woodford, Howell, Kulick, and Silverschanz (2013) utilized secondary data analysis on campus climate to study the nuances of verbal harassment and biased language used by heterosexual male undergraduates. The researchers found that heterosexual men who used phrases such as “that’s so gay” held negative perceptions of

feminine or non-gender conforming men. The researchers found, too, that when non-LGB students reported having LGB acquaintances, the non-LGB students associated negative feelings with the use of biased language.

Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin (2015) surveyed community college students who identified as LGBTQ via open- and closed-ended survey questions. Participating students reported that the classroom was the most important space in determining campus climate perceptions. The majority of these students reported also negative experiences inside the classroom. The researchers found that first-generation students reported more negative campus climate perceptions and experiences than those who were not first-generation students. LGBTQ students reported feeling that LGBTQ individuals and issues lacked representation in the curriculum. The absence of LGBTQ representation furthered their negative perceptions of campus climate. I believe this study makes some strong arguments for the importance of the environment inside classrooms, as well as for LGBTQ representation in curriculum. Not many studies have been conducted about campus climate at community colleges. I felt that this was an important study to include, as the students are within the same general age range of those at Southern Research University. Certainly one could make an argument regarding the difference between community and university campuses.

Finally, Gortmaker and Brown (2006) surveyed 80 out LGBT students on a Midwestern college campus. The researchers found that campus climate was imperative in considering whether or not one should come out, and just how out one should be. A strong majority (80%) of LGBT students reported feeling the need to hide their sexuality or gender identity in order to avoid unfair treatment from students, faculty, and health

care providers. Further, participants reported that they grappled with the decision of whether or not to report incidents of harassment, and inequitable access to campus resources.

Overall, the majority (26) of these studies were mostly concerned with the experiences of LGBTQ individuals across L,G,B,T communities. However, it is important to note that five studies focused on only gay men and only one study focused on lesbian women. Assessing comparative coverage of issues navigated by gay men versus lesbian women would be a compelling issue for future research.

## **2.5 GLSEN's Climate Study Domains**

Researchers with GLSEN (2013) completed a national survey with 7,898 LGBTQ students between the ages of 13 and 21. Participants came from all 50 United States and the District of Columbia. The majority of students were white (68.1%), cisgender<sup>11</sup> (75.6%), and female (43.6%). All students were in grades 6-12. Researchers recruited participants via outreach to schools through nonprofits and online social media. GLSEN's researchers have thoroughly examined the national climate for LGBTQ populations in middle and high schools, but to date they have not examined climates at IHEs. I argue that the use of GLSEN's domains in this research design will benefit the scholars and communities committed to LGBTQ youth.

GLSEN's researchers utilized six domains in order to examine campus climate: (1) school safety, (2) exposure to biased language, (3) experiences of harassment and assault at school, (4) reporting of school-based harassment and assault, (5) experiences of discrimination at school, and (6) hostile school climate and educational outcomes

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<sup>11</sup> Schilt and Westbrook (2009) define cisgender as an identity label wherein a person's gender identity matches their biological sex from birth.

(GLSEN 2013). In this portion of my literature review, I discuss briefly some of the findings from each of these domains.

**2.4.1 School Safety.** Researchers from GLSEN (2013) found that more than half of LGBTQ students (55.5%) reported feeling unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation. Further, 38.7% of students felt unsafe because of their gender expression. This is problematic, as participants indicated that not feeling safe influenced them to avoid certain school settings, or to skip school altogether. Rankin (2005) found that safety was one of the top concerns for LGBTQ students in IHEs, too.

**2.4.2 Exposure to Biased Language.** In GLSEN's (2013) study, 64.5% of participants reported hearing other students using derogatory speech, such as "dyke" or "faggot." Additionally—and in my opinion revoltingly—51.4% of participants reported hearing derogatory or homophobic remarks from faculty and staff. Further, 74.1% of participants reported hearing the word "gay" used with a negative connotation, typically in place of words like "stupid" or "worthless." Studies reflecting the dominance of biased language IHEs included experiences negative campus climates (e.g. Nadal et al., 2010; Silverschanz, et al., 2008; Woodford et al., 2012; Woodford et al., 2013)

**2.4.3 Experiences of Harassment and Assault at School.** GLSEN's (2013) researchers found that 85.4% of participants reported being verbally harassed at some point in the past year based on perceived or known sexuality or gender expression. Over a third (39.3%) of participants indicated that they had been physically harassed (such as being shoved or pushed) at school at some point over the past year. Fewer respondents (19%) reported being physically assaulted (such as being punched, kicked, or injured with a weapon). Further, 59.3% of participants indicated that they had been sexually



harassed at school, and 17.7% of participants indicated that instances of sexual harassment happened often or frequently. Similarly, Rankin (2003) found that 36% of LGBTQ college students have reported physical harassment and assault at IHEs. Further studies also found disheartening amounts of harassment (e.g.; Rankin, 1998; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996).

**2.4.4 Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault.** Over half (56.7%) of participants in GLSEN's (2013) study indicated that they had never reported instances of harassment and assault to school staff. Of the reasons that participants did not report harassment and assault, 32.5% participants indicated that they believed staff intervention would be ineffective or would not occur. Over 23% of the participants indicated that they worried that faculty or staff intervention would make the situation worse. Over 19% of participants worried that faculty or staff would not believe that the severity of the instance warranted interference, and 17% of participants indicated that they worried about negative reactions from the faculty and staff. Gortmaker and Brown (2006) found, too, that LGBTQ students at IHEs described reluctance about reporting experiences of harassment and inequitable access to campus resources.

**2.4.5 Experiences of Discrimination in School.** Researchers at GLSEN (2013) found that 38.9% of participants expressed that their schools had disciplined LGBTQ students for public displays of affection, although heterosexual students were not punished for their displays of affection. Almost a quarter (23.5%) of participants indicated that they and their schools had been forbidden from discussing or writing about LGBT topics. Further, 17.8% of participants indicated that they had been hindered in forming a GSA or other official school club. Similarly, in IHEs, Ritchie and Banning

(2001) found that individuals attempting to establish LGBTQSRO encountered difficulty from faculty, staff, special interest groups, and students.

**2.4.6 Hostile School Climate and Educational Outcomes.** GLSEN (2013) researchers found that instances of victimization participants reported and educational aspirations shared a negative correlation. The researchers did not share the exact value or significance of the test. Hostile school environments in IHEs have been linked to negative educational outcomes in other studies as well (e.g. Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010).

**2.4.7 Conclusion.** Being out can be what I would call a double-edged sword (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; GLSEN, 2013; Howard and Stevens, 2000; Rankin (1998, 2003, 2005, et al. 2015; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 1996). There are many positive experiences associated with being out across educational contexts. However, there are many negative and complex consequences associated with being out as well — the terrifying experience of harassment based on expressed sexual identity among them. I hope that this study increases awareness of LGBT student experiences coming and being out at a predominantly white institution in the South.

## CHAPTER 3:

### METHODOLOGY

#### **3.1 Methodological Orientation**

In her book *On Intellectual Activism*, Collins (2012) discussed the value of qualitative research in understanding the complex experiences of oppressed individuals, and she argued for the importance of quantitative research as a means of enacting change. My formal research training began in strongly quantitative programs. Upon discovering the field of foundations of education, I began to take courses in qualitative methodology. It was in these classes that I struggled with conceptions of research that were not generalizable. Slowly, I began to see that quantitative methodologies provided only so much information. Additional information, such as why things happen, need to be explored with qualitative inquiry. For example, if I wanted to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of LGBTQ individuals and spark potential policy change, I would need to use more than one methodology. I felt that quantitative methodology was similar to reading the table of contents, while qualitative methodology was reading the book itself. My values shifted, and I became more frustrated with the idea that others had that qualitative research was not as rigorous as quantitative research, and therefore, not as useful in affecting policy change (Smit, 2003).

Collins (2012) articulated the need for both qualitative and quantitative approaches. I have adopted her argument for the use of both in this research. I believe

that I need to use quantitative research in order to most readily enact change (Collins, 2012; Smit, 2003). Policymakers, in my experience, prefer generalizability in contrast to in-depth examination. However, the in-depth examination produced in qualitative inquiry allowed me to better understand the complexity of campus climate and experiences of LGBTQ students at Southern Research University (SRU). Because of this, I have used the findings from my focus groups to provide a rich description of SRU's campus climate and to inform my survey design. I have used the quantitative data from my survey, constructed from the focus group findings and the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network's (GLSEN's) instrument (2013) to analyze LGBTQ student experience. In using both methodologies, I have acquired greater depth and breadth in my study.

***On using mixed methods in LGBTQ research.*** According to Brown and Gortmaker (2009), the utilization of a mixed-methods approach is especially appropriate for research concerning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ) students. Mixed methodologies require the use of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In this case, using both methodologies allowed me to collect data from which I was not able to generalize due to a small sample size, though I was able to examine trends among survey respondents and provide in-depth descriptions of campus experiences from LGBTQ students, thus generating detail, explanation, and everyday experience. Utilizing mixed methods allows the researcher to place qualitative data into general context—context that provides more breadth than qualitative data alone (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Hesse-Biber (2010) argued that qualitative research yielded rich narratives that were useful for understanding cultural contexts from which quantitative data could be

generated. For her, mixing methods enabled researchers to examine the interconnectedness of different variables. Examining the interconnectedness of different variables was useful in research that had been designed to challenge power structures. Generalizable quantitative data can reflect how widespread an issue is, while in-depth qualitative data can reflect how and why power structures can damage oppressed individuals. One example of challenging power structures was Renn's (2007) study. Renn studied the interconnectedness of student leader identities and LGBTQ identities in higher education. Specifically, she examined the intersections of these identities in a non-supportive university setting. LGBT participants discussed their desire to upset power structures. Renn argued (and participants agreed) that LGBTQ individuals could upset power structures simply by being visible in IHEs. I believe that conducting this research on campus climate as experienced by LGBTQ students will make LGBTQ populations more visible to SRU administrators and student affairs staff. Upon graduation, I plan to disseminate my findings to the LGBT Student Resource Office (LGBTSRO), the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA), and the CDO. The recommendations I made from my findings (Please see Chapter 6) reflect a need for myriad changes at SRU.

Given that my aims were to influence SRU's policymaking concerning LGBTQ students, examining the interconnectedness of different variables has allowed me to represent a more compelling argument for change. Consequently, it is my hope that findings from this study will inform current policies within existing university structures. I do not yet know if this will be the case, but I believe using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies allowed me to develop a more complex, deep, and nuanced argument.

**3.1.1 Parallel Mixed Methods.** I utilized a modified version of Hesse-Biber's (2010) parallel mixed-methods design. According to Hesse-Biber (2010), a parallel mixed methods design is the most commonly used form of mixed-methods designs. She stated, "parallel mixed methods designs consist of the concurrent mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods carried out as separate studies within the same research project" (p. 68). At first glance, a parallel mixed methods design may look like two separate studies examining the same thing, however, Hesse-Biber (2010) posited that mixing the methods creates a strong single study, as the researcher is able to utilize both the depth of information available through qualitative research and the breadth of information available through quantitative research. A researcher producing a parallel mixed methods study would use both a qualitative and a quantitative methodology to address the same topic. She would use qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze the data from each respective study, and then compare and contrast findings between the two studies. See Figure 3.1 for a simplified representation of Hesse-Biber's (2010) parallel mixed methods design. Hesse-Biber (2010) argued that

[A] parallel design may still offer the researcher some opportunities for more direct engagement of datasets by having the researcher engage in reflexivity regarding how her or his quantitative findings may raise new questions that are connected in some substantive way to the research problem rather than using the quantitative data atheoretically. For instance, the researcher might seek out points of connection, guided by her or his original research question, at both the data analysis and data interpretation stages, by consciously comparing and contrasting the research findings from both datasets. (p. 69)

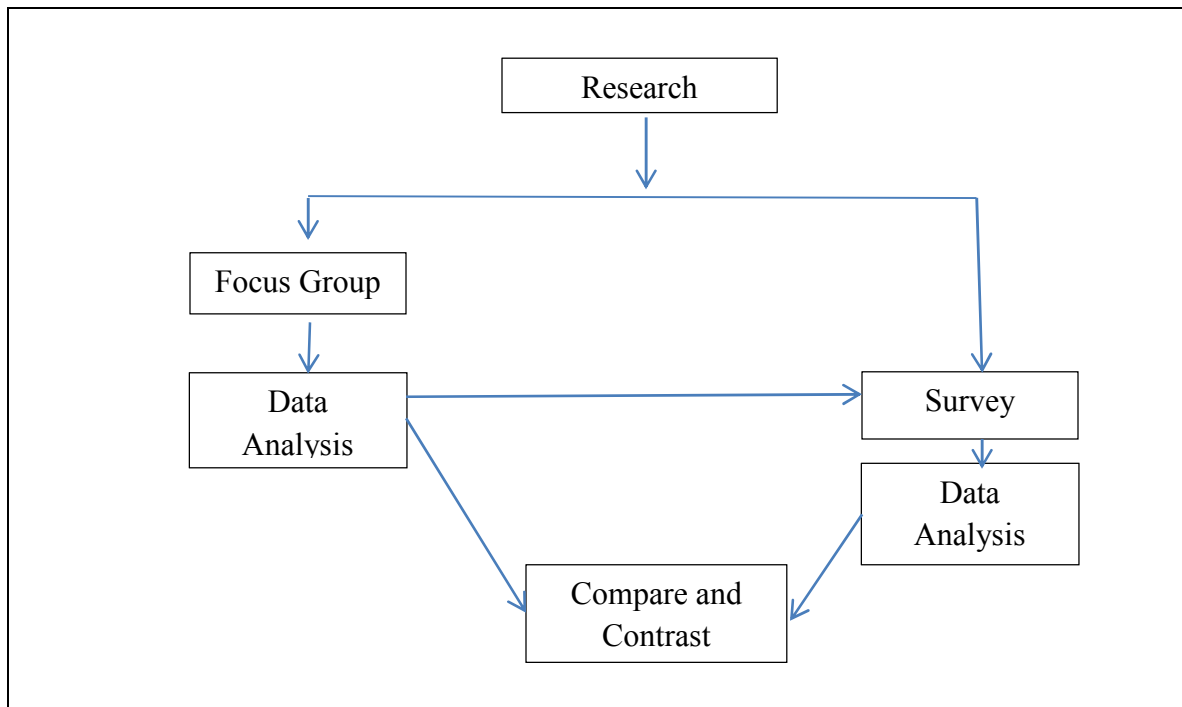


interventions or large scale surveys and test instruments, or to ascertain what topics are relevant to people with whom they are working. (p. 38)

In this study, I utilized the findings from the focus groups to “ascertain what topics” were “relevant” (Roulston, 2011. p. 38) to the LGBTQ populations on campus. Strategically, I altered Hesse-Biber’s original design by taking this step. Although the six domains of GLSEN’s (2012) climate instrument grounded my survey instrument, my analysis of the focus group data generated additional survey items.

Specifically, I conducted three focus groups with L, G, B, T, and/or Q-identified students before sending the survey to SRU’s student body. Following my analysis of the focus group data, I added new questions to the instrument that reflected ideas brought to my attention during the focus groups. I returned to Hesse-Biber’s design after this step, by comparing and contrasting the data analyses from both the focus groups and the survey. I created Figure 3.2 below to represent my modification of Hesse-Biber’s (2010) parallel mixed methods design. Figure 3.2 shows that data were collected via focus groups, analyzed, and then applied where relevant to the construction of the survey. After I collected survey data, I analyzed it by creating construct variables that combined scales from within the instrument and examining correlation coefficients. Finally, I mixed the analyses from both the focus groups and the survey. I think that the best approach to answering my research questions was the use of mixing methodologies. Doing so allowed me to document the trends of experience and to capture rich descriptions of issues facing LGBTQ students at SRU.





*Figure 3.2.* This study’s modified version of Hesse-Biber’s (2010) Parallel Mixed Methods study design.

I completed this study by utilizing focus group and survey methodologies in a modified parallel mixed method design. The focus groups informed the development of survey items, as I completed the focus groups and analyzed the focus group data prior to the dissemination of the survey. After I analyzed survey results, I compared and contrasted findings between the two data sets. All of the data gathered was used in an attempt to answer my research questions.

### **3.1.2 Research Questions.**

- (1) How do Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) students who are out experience the campus climate at Southern Research University?
  - a. How do Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer students describe the effects of being “out” on their lives at Southern Research University?

- b. When applying GLSEN's climate study domains, do students who are "out" report different experiences compared to students who are closeted? What are those differences?
- c. How do LGBTQ students' experiences reported in the focus groups complement or contrast LGBTQ students' experiences captured in the survey responses?

**3.1.3 Qualitative Focus Groups.** Blackstone (2012) defined focus groups as "planned discussions designed to elicit group interaction" (p. 311). Krueger and Casey (2000) argued that the use of focus group is to "obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (p. 5). Following the recommendations of Blackstone (2012), Krueger and Casey (2000), and Morgan (1996) I invited focus group participants to respond to and ask questions of others within the focus group. I served as a moderator and facilitated the discussion of each question (Fowler, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1996; Roulston, 2011).

Further, a peer and colleague from Public Health experienced in focus group protocols took notes for me during my first focus group. Her notes captured brief descriptions of what was said as well as non-verbal cues from participants. I used these notes when reflecting upon the focus group during analysis. She provided feedback for me about conducting focus groups and how I could improve as a moderator. Note-takers are helpful additions to a focus group, as they are able to take more detailed observation notes than the moderator, who should be engaging participants (Mack, 2005).

I analyzed data that were produced during the focus groups and used my analysis to refine the quantitative survey.

**3.1.4 Quantitative Surveys.** Survey research is the best method available for examining a population that is too large to observe directly (Babbie, 2004; Fowler, 2014). Surveys are useful for examining the attitudes and perceptions of members within a population (Babbie, 2004) – in this case, LGBTQ students at an institution of higher education. In the survey, I utilized questions that were both open-ended and closed-response in order to assess different levels of depth (Babbie, 2004; Fink, 2012; Fowler, 2014). In the survey, mainly I used closed-response questions, however, I did include open-ended questions in order to elicit specific accounts of discrimination as well as specific accounts of celebratory or nurturing experiences in LGBTQ communities. My use of closed-ended survey items expedited data analysis, (Fink, 2012; Fowler, 2014). In my opinion, survey methodology was the best method to use to capture breadth of information. However, results from survey methodology do not always reflect in-depth understandings—a factor I addressed through the use of focus groups. I did not find this to be the case in this study. The majority of salient points and themes from the focus groups were reflected in the survey data as well (Please see Chapters 4, 5, and 6 for discussion of the data gained from both methodological approaches).

### **3.2 Emic and Etic Data**

Emic data are defined as “information supplied by participants in a study... [emic data] often refers to first-order concepts such as local language, concepts, and ways of expression used by members in a cultural-sharing group” (Creswell, 2012, p. 620). I pursued emic data during my focus groups. Etic data are defined as “information representing the [researcher’s] interpretation of the participant’s perspective” (Creswell,

2012, p. 620). I approached the survey data from an etic perspective using in particular GLSEN's (2013) six domains of campus climate.

GLSEN (2013) has clearly defined six domains that create the non-profit organization's construct of campus climate. I used each of GLSEN's domains in the development of my survey instrument. As I discussed in Chapter 2, GLSEN's domains are; (1) school safety, (2) exposure to biased language, (3) experiences of harassment and assault at school/ on campus, (4) reporting of school/campus-based harassment and assault, (5) experiences of discrimination at school/on campus, and (6) hostile campus climate effects on educational outcomes.

### **3.3 Sources for Data Collection**

**3.3.1 Development of the Focus Group Protocol.** I developed questions to loosely guide the focus group (Please see Appendix A for the Focus Group Protocol). I performed semi-structured focus groups. Roulston (2011) stated that researchers who are conducting semi-structured interviews or focus groups enter each session with a set of questions but allow the conversation to proceed in directions led by the participant(s). She argued that while each interview or focus group may have the same set of guiding questions, the information from each respective interview or focus group might be different, as participants may lead the conversation in different ways. Semi-structured focus groups reflect both the researcher interests and participant interests. Participants in semi-structured focus groups have some freedom within the focus group discussion to expand on their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences (Glesne, 2011). My questions were broad, as I wanted to invite LGBTQ students to share their experiences. I listened and probed, while allowing information that interested the participants and me to unfold

naturally (Patton, 2002). I audio recorded the focus groups and kept detailed observation notes as I listened and asked questions of the students.

**3.3.2 Development of the Survey.** I adapted my survey from the 2013 climate study created by GLSEN. GLSEN's instrument has been used nationally and completed by thousands of respondents who identify as L, G, B, T, and/or Q (GLSEN, 2012). GLSEN has conducted climate surveys and refined their instrument for 15 years. However, GLSEN's instruments have always focused on LGBT youth under the age of 18 (GLSEN, 2013).

Rankin (2003) focused on LGBT individuals in institutions of higher education using a similar survey instrument. Rankin's work more closely aligns with my own. Rankin's study focused on all individuals within a college (i.e., students, faculty, and staff), whereas I only examined the students. Rankin's survey has been used at 14 different IHEs around the nation. Compared to GLSEN's survey, Rankin's is relatively short. It does not include all of the domains contained in GLSEN's instrument, instead Rankin focuses on three constructs (lived oppressive experiences, perceptions of anti-LGBT oppression on campus, and institutional actions). In my opinion, researchers wishing to explore campus climate should use GLSEN's expanded instrument to collect a wider breadth of information.

### **3.4 Description of Study Site and Participants**

**3.4.1 Participant Selection: Focus Groups.** For the focus group portion of my study, I utilized a limited number of "information-rich cases" to provide "insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). Focusing on "information-rich cases" (Patton, 2002, p. 230) enabled me to "learn a great

deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Patton, 2002, p. 46). Glesne (2011) suggested that spending “extended periods of time with fewer respondents and observation sites” (p. 46) generates in-depth understandings of particular phenomena. As such, the use of focus groups to investigate the experiences of out LGBTQ students on campus was a productive choice.

Often individuals who identify as L, G, B, T, or Q are part of a hidden subculture and therefore, are not easily reachable for research studies (Lopez & Chims, 1993). To best reach L, G, B, T, and/or Q-identified students, I pursued purposeful chain (or snowball) sampling. Creswell (2012) defined chain (or snowball) sampling as a process whereby the researcher “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (p. 158). I used connections with well-situated individuals who understood the purpose of the study and who were actively involved as staff or as students in LGBT issues on campus to help find participants who met my research interests (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). My selection criteria for participants were broad. The criteria included (1) current enrollment at the university; (2) identification as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer or questioning; and (3) identification of “out<sup>13</sup>”.

Recruitment emails were sent out via the LBTSRO, the LBTSU, and disseminated through my personal network, which I asked potential participants to share with anyone they knew who might be interested. Potential participants were instructed to email me with their interest and availability. In total, thirteen people responded to my call for participants; nine participated. Four individuals contacted me stating their interest, but

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<sup>13</sup> Mayo (2007) defines being out as when an individual “self-consciously and publicly identifies” as a member of a sexual minority group” (p. 82).

shared that they were not able to come to campus. In order to reach these individuals, I decided to facilitate an online focus group. Three additional participants stated that they planned on attending focus groups – one in the first, one in the second, and one in the third – but did not show up. One additional potential participant indicated that they<sup>14</sup> were uncomfortable meeting in person, and using video or voice chat in an online setting. I attempted to reach this individual to ask if they would like to chat with me through a text-based online option, but they did not return my further communication efforts.

Of the nine participants who participated, four identified as lesbians, two as gay, two as bisexual, and one as pansexual<sup>15</sup>. Five participants identified as cisgender female, two as cisgender male, one as transgender female, and one as gender queer. Four participants were undergraduate students and five were graduate students. I have displayed focus group participant demographics in Table 3.1.

SRU is a four-year public institution of higher education. SRU is a Predominantly White Institution (PWI); white or Caucasian students constitute 79.4% of the student body (Southern Research University Admissions Website, 2015). Consequently, I expected a racially homogenous focus group. Eight focus group participants identified as white, while one identified as Black.

I conducted two of the focus groups in a building on SRU's campus, and one online via Google Hangouts. The focus groups took between 45 minutes and 105 minutes. I experienced difficulty during the focus group that I conducted via Google Hangouts, as participants in contrast to the face-to-face focus groups did not converse with one another. Rather they directed their responses to only me. They did not speak to

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<sup>14</sup> This individual preferred to use they and their as pronouns.

<sup>15</sup> Cavendish (2010) posited, "pansexuals believe that a person can develop physical attraction, love, and sexual desire for people regardless of their gender identity or biological sex" (p. 593).

each other. I believe that this may be due partially to the virtual medium by which the group was conducted, as participants were not physically together.

**3.4.2 Participant Selection: Surveys.** It was difficult to reach all LGBTQ members of the student body, because SRU does not request categorical identification on gender expression, sexual orientation, or transgender identification from students. Therefore, I sent the survey via e-mail to all enrolled students at SRU.

In Chapter 1 I referred to my experience as an intern at East Carolina University (ECU). In response to the results from a climate study we conducted, the administration at ECU created the LGBT Student Resource Office. The process of analyzing the survey data from the climate study included data cleaning and analysis. At ECU students, faculty, and staff who did not identify as L, G, B, T, or Q answered survey questions, thus creating confusion during analysis. My internship advisor at the time, Dr. Linda Mooney, addressed those responses by counting non-LGBTQ students' answers as missing. For this study, I had two participants respond to the survey who identified as cisgender and heterosexual. Because I am interested in the perspectives of LGBTQ students on campus, I removed these cases from the analyses.



Table 3.1

*Focus Group Participant Demographics*

Focus Group	Name	Identity	Pronoun Preference	Level	Major	From
1	Sara	Bisexual Female	She	Undergraduate	Psychology and Biology	Southeast
1	Michelle	Lesbian Female	She	Graduate	Higher Education and Student Affairs	Midwest
1	AJ	Lesbian Female	She	Graduate	Political Science	Southeast
2	Paloma	Bisexual Female	She	Graduate	Public Administration and Business Administration	Southeast
2	Rachel	Transgender Lesbian Female	She	Undergraduate	Computer Science	Southeast
2	Justin	Gay Male	He	Graduate	Education	Southeast
3	Alex	Gender Queer Pansexual	They	Undergraduate	*	*
3	Denise	Lesbian Female	She	Graduate	History	Southeast
3	Scott	Gay Male	He	Undergraduate	Earth Science	Southeast

Note: \* indicates that the participant did not wish to share her, his, or their information.

Originally, I had planned to e-mail all students at SRU through the university's informational technology department. The department offers this service at a price (\$350 per mass e-mail), and uses it to mass e-mail students about businesses around campus (for example, local apartments). This resource was not available to me in conducting research. The informational technology department stated that I would need permission from the registrar in order to send the e-mail. The registrar, after not returning my phone calls for a week, stated that the Provost's Office would need to give their permission. The Vice Provost who replied to my request stated the following;

Dear Ms. Cain,

Your request to send a mass or bulk email to SRU students was forwarded to us by the Registrar's Office. After considerable deliberation involving that office and the Office of Student Affairs and Academic Support, the Office of the Provost has declined your request to send a distinct, stand-alone mass or bulk email to our students at this time.

However, we can offer a useful suggestion that you may wish to pursue. You may send the invitation and survey link to all students via the weekly email communiqué sent by Student Affairs and Academic Support. [My assistant], who coordinates the weekly email sent to all students each Sunday night, could assist you with this. This communiqué was designed was for such purposes, and students have indicated to Student Affairs and Academic Support leadership that this is their preferred method of receiving such University messages. If well written and formatted, this would be an effective means to reach all USC students. Thank you for your understanding, and best wishes for success with your study.

My link was sent out through the Vice Provost's Office's weekly digest on Sunday, September 6, and Sunday, September 20. The link was listed third in a list of six "news" links SRU published, and was titled "Survey for LGBT Students." The link was sent to individuals who were signed up to receive weekly digests through the LGBTSRO, too, on Wednesday, September 9. The weekly digest concluded with the following paragraph;

Leia K. Cain is a graduate student at the [REDACTED] She is conducting a climate survey for LGBTQ students on campus as part of her dissertation. If you are a LGBTQ-identified undergraduate student, and have the time, please take a moment and check out this survey.

Unfortunately, I believe that the alternative route of recruitment SRU's Vice Provost's Office preferred may have caused my response rate to be much lower than it may have been had SRU granted me access to the entire student body via a direct email. I think that it is possible that many students did not read the e-mail, and those who did choose to read the email might not have scrolled to the end of the weekly digest. A single, individual email, sent out to all SRU students, might have vastly improved my response rate, which was 68 students. While I cannot prove that claim, I do wish to note that the recruitment e-mail sent out for East Carolina University's survey (2011) was an individual call to participate (instead of being included in a weekly digest), and the climate study conducted at ECU attained much higher response rates (above 300).

A total of 68 individuals participated in the survey. Respondents were largely undergraduate (n=65, 93.6%). Most participants identified as gay (n=21, 31.8%), followed by bisexual individuals (n=19, 28.8%), lesbians (n=11, 16.7%), pansexuals (n=5, 7.6%), queer (n=2, 3%), and questioning (n=1, 1.5%). Two respondents identified

as heterosexual, and four identified as another orientation. Other orientations were written in, and included “asexual” (n=2), “pretty gay” (n=1), “demisexual” (n=1), and one respondent did not share her, hir, or his sexual orientation. The majority of respondents identified as cisgender women (n=29, 48.3%), followed by cisgender men (n=21, 35%), gender queer (n=6, 10%), and one transgender man. Five participants identified themselves as “other,” with two identifying as “agender,” one as “demiagender girl,” and two did not share her, hir, or his identity label. Racially, most respondents identified as White (n=53), followed by Black (n=12), Asian or Pacific Islander (n=3) and Latino/a, Chicano/a, or Hispanic (n=3), American Indian or Alaskan Native (n=1), and other (n=1). The respondent who chose “other” did not share how she, sie/ze he identified. I detail survey participant demographics further in Chapter 5.

### **3.5 Analysis**

**3.5.1 Focus Group Coding.** According to Saldaña (2009), “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Saldaña framed the coding process in two main coding cycles:

First cycle methods are those processes that happen during the initial coding of data and are divided into seven subcategories: grammatical, elemental, affective, literary and language, exploratory, procedural, and a final profile entitled theming the data... Second cycle methods are a bit more challenging because they require such analytic skills as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building. (p. 45)

After transcribing the focus groups, my first cycle of coding consisted of descriptive coding, which occurs when the researcher uses singular words or short phrases to summarize primary topics (Saldaña, 2009). I examined my descriptive codes in order to find “repetitive patterns of action and consistencies in human affairs as documented in the data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 5). During first cycle coding, I also utilized in vivo coding. In vivo coding is coding with the language the participants have used. Quotes from participants were used to represent salient points (Saldaña, 2009). I used both in vivo coding and descriptive coding, because Saldaña, (2009) argued that practicing both allows researchers to practice discernment between data represented through the words of the participant (in vivo), versus data represented in the words of the researcher (descriptive).

After coding and subcoding with descriptive codes and in vivo codes I began second-cycle coding. Second cycle coding involves “classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 45). I used pattern coding in second cycle coding to guide my interpretations of the data. Saldaña (2009) defined pattern coding as a step that “develops the ‘meta-code’ – the category label that identifies similarly coded data. Codes not only organize the corpus but attempt to attribute meaning to that organization” (p. 150). According to Saldaña (2009), pattern codes are “explanatory of inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis” (p. 152). I built my second cycle pattern coding from my first cycle descriptive and in vivo coding. I moved from first cycle descriptive and in vivo coding into second cycle pattern coding by using the subcoding process. “A subcode

is a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry, depending on the volume of data you have or specificity you may need for categorization and data analysis” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 77). Subcoding allowed me to look across the data to interpret patterns.

After first and second cycle coding have been completed, Saldaña, (2009) suggested that the researchers should then “have several major categories, themes, or concepts” (p. 184). After analyzing salient points and themes, I synthesized information across each in order to make decisions about additional survey items.

**3.5.2 Survey Analysis.** I primarily utilized survey data through the construction of composite variables that reflect each domain of GLSEN’s (2013) survey: (1) school safety, (2) exposure to biased language, (3) experiences of harassment and assault on campus, (4) reporting of school or campus based harassment and assault, (5) experiences of discrimination on campus, and (6) hostile campus climate and educational outcomes. I created a new construct, too, (7) passing privilege, based on data collected from the focus groups.

GLSEN’s (2013) report from its National School Climate Survey reflects the use of mainly descriptive statistics, with few correlations. Specifically, I examined the relationships between outness and the seven domains represented above. Primarily, I was interested in the differences between the experiences of LGBTQ students who were out and those who were not. I conducted correlational analyses to compare the relationship between how out someone was (i.e., how many spaces or people to whom they were out on campus, which was measured by asking respondents to report their outness on a scale of 0-6) and their perceptions of campus climate through the six climate domains. I

hypothesized that those students who were out would experience more campus climate more negatively than those who were not (for example, more harassment, exposure to biased language, and a lower overall feeling of safety on campus). My independent variable was outness. My dependent variables were the six GLSEN (2013) domains and the constructed domain of passing privilege.

### **3.6 Reflexivity**

According to Glesne (2011), “reflexivity generally involves critical reflection on how researcher, research participants, setting, and research procedures interact and influence each other” (p. 151). Analyzing one’s own beliefs and engaging in reflexive practice is of paramount importance because one must be aware of any personal biases they are bringing to research (Mason, 2014).

In this section, I will address my subjectivities and positionality as part of a reflexive practice. Personally, I do not believe that one can be truly objective. Instead, I believe that a researcher brings her or his own personal experiences, perceptions, and biases into research, and that individuals are not always completely aware of their own subjectivities. All individuals have experiences and interlocking identities that inform their understanding and interpretation of subject matter (Collins, 2012). For example, I cannot approach research interests, design, data collection or analysis without my own experiences of being a white woman informing my understandings of the subject. Indeed, researchers must be aware of their subjectivity – or what those lenses, identities, and previous life experiences they bring to the research process (Lather, 1986). Reflecting on my subjectivities and positionality allowed me to work against myself and potentially

avoid forcing data I collected “into preconceived interpretive schemes” (Lather, 1986, p. 65).

**3.6.1 Subjectivity.** Subjectivity is “an integral part of interpretivist research from deciding on the research topic to selecting frames of analysis” (Glesne, 2011, p. 152). Glesne argued (2011) that reflecting on one’s subjectivity throughout the course of a research project is important because doing so allows researchers to examine how their subjectivities affect their choice of research topics, their actions in the research process and their interpretations of data. I have attempted to define my own subjectivities here, though Glesne cautions that one can never know oneself in ways that allow for the anticipation of all the effects of her or his subjectivities.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, my mother came out as a lesbian when I was 14. I do not remember explicitly being told during my childhood that two individuals of the same sex loving each other was atypical or wrong – not until high school. In high school when it became public knowledge that my mother was dating women I heard these messages from classmates, friends, and family members. Before this, I had speculated about perceptions of homosexuality when I found that Haruka and Michiru’s relationship had been altered in the English-version of Sailor Moon broadcast in the U.S. The bigotry I experienced in high school concretely confirmed my speculation that some individuals believed that homosexuality was wrong. It was at this time due to my mother’s disclosure and my critique of the English-version of Haruka and Michiru that I started to truly pay attention to the media portrayals of “appropriate” relationships. I began speaking to my LGB-identified friends about their issues within their families and social groups.



Helping my LGB friends became my passion. As the child of a lesbian mother, I began to stand up for myself, too, and for my friends, when others said hurtful things. As an adult, I was introduced to the fields of LGBT studies and queer theory. My passion evolved to include the hope of conducting research about the experiences of LGBTQ individuals, with the aim of one day affecting public policy.

My passion for disrupting heteronormative<sup>16</sup> policies reflects my commitments to LGBTQ family and friends and my longstanding tradition of supporting them. This same commitment may lead me to interpret the data in ways that will increase support and resources for LGBTQ students, as I believe many LGBTQ students experience negative and at times hostile campus climates. I may find myself discrediting participants who believe that life on campus is not difficult. I believe that all LGBTQ people experience oppression and should be aware of oppression. In order to practice reflexivity and work against some of my presuppositions, I had planned to keep a research journal where I would write my own experiences and emotions before and after focus groups and during coding and analysis of both focus group and survey data. I had reflected on my own biases before the first focus group, as planned. While I kept a research journal, it turned out to be more of a reflection on my methodological questions and struggles than with my biases. I found it easy to believe participants, and instead of disbelief, I found myself enthralled with their stories and experiences.

Another subjective lens (Glesne, 2011) that I bring to theoretical work that informed my commitments to LGBTQ justice and research projects is that of a feminist woman. During my undergraduate career, I was president of East Carolina University's

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<sup>16</sup> The dictionary defines heteronormative as "noting or relating to behavior or attitudes consistent with traditional male or female gender roles and the assumption of heterosexuality as the norm."

feminist student organization for two years. Currently, I am involved with the feminist student organization. For the last ten years I have personally been involved with producing *The Vagina Monologues*. Through the productions, I have helped raise over \$60,000 for battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers across North and South Carolina.

Oswald, Kuvalanka, Blume, and Berkowitz (2009) argued that there was tension between researchers and theorists in feminist studies and LGBT studies. The researchers stated that the tension occurred there in two areas: (1) conceptual incompatibilities between feminist studies and LGBT studies, and (2) ontological incompatibilities between feminist studies and LGBT studies. For example, Oswald et al. argued,

Despite queer theory's convergence with aspects of feminism and LG studies, considerable tensions exist. First, there are conceptual incompatibilities; specifically, the deconstruction of binaries undermines the necessary fiction of stable and collective identities on which social movements [such as feminism] depend. To the extent that queer theory redefines gender and sexuality as reiterated discourses rather than identities with a material base (e.g., Butler, 1990), it trivializes injustice by deflecting attention away from the global material inequalities that women, including lesbians, continue to suffer, and it resists any possibility of social change. Furthermore, the queer theory position that power is enforced through the internalization of discourses ("docile bodies") rather than brute force is untenable when we consider, for example, the high prevalence of rape and domestic violence and the inadequate institutional response to survivors. Feminist and LG scholars with a materialist orientation do not dispute that

internalization plays an important role in reproducing power relations; rather, they object to the idea that power can be reduced to it. (p. 47-48)

I consider myself a feminist, because I strive for equality for all individuals.

Feminist literature (Butler, 1988, 1990; hooks, 1994, 2000; Lorde, 1978, 1984, 1988) helped me define my gender identity and gave me language for beliefs that I long held even when I did not have the words to frame them myself. Specifically, I was able to learn about patriarchy<sup>17</sup> and how participating in patriarchal systems contributes to gender oppression. While I can understand the tense and problematic relationship between feminist and LGBT or Queer Studies, I feel that these fields can work together. This is likely due to my belief that feminism is for everyone; I believe that many of the issues women and LGBTQ populations face can be tied to similar restraints against heterosexist patriarchal oppressions.

My subjective lens as a feminist woman primes me to seek ways of understanding dominant patriarchal and heteronormative culture and the consequences of such oppressions generally and the ways both patriarchal and heteronormative culture may intersect with the experiences my LGBT focus group participants share in particular. I may find myself searching for instances of LGBTQ students consenting to hegemonies of patriarchy and heteronormativity, even when instances may not be evident in the data or articulated by my participants. Indeed, in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, I explore the concept of passing privilege – or the act of concealing one’s gender identity or sexual orientation – an action in which over 80% of survey respondents indicated they participated (Goffman,

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<sup>17</sup> The dictionary defines patriarchy as “a system of society or government in which men hold the power and women are largely excluded from it.”

1963). Sharing that they passed to maintain their comfort is illustrative of the dominant patriarchal and heteronormative culture pervasive in the U.S.

Additionally, I may discount or discredit some of the discomfort that white males who identify as G, B, T, and/or Q may share, as I believe that women and people of color experience more frequent hardship and hardships that are significantly different than those of white men – even those who may be G, B, T, or Q – identified. I am ashamed to admit that this might be a possibility. I should be open to the struggles of all people, and I want to make my prejudice transparent so that I can work against it. As I represented the focus group data I realized that I wanted to know more from Justin, and Scott, and that because Justin had shared more in the focus group due to including racially-based concerns, I had more data from him than I did Scott. During this reflection upon my work, I did find myself more empathetic toward Justin, a gay Black cisgender male, than I did to Scott, a gay White cisgender male. This may be due in part to Justin sharing his struggles with the Black community, whereas Scott did not discuss struggles that might have compounded his oppression as a gay male. Specifically, I think following up with Justin about his experiences might have opened a space for me to examine the intersections of race, sexuality, and masculinity. Inviting Scott to participate during the focus group might have opened a space for him to share intersections of his identities as well.

As I mentioned above I used a research journal throughout the process. I employed member checking as well. Member checking refers to the practice of inquiring from participants whether or not I have accurately represented and interpreted that which they have shared (Creswell, 2012). Throughout the process of writing Chapter 4, I sent

focus group participants portions of what I had written for confirmation and clarifications. I did not receive communication in return from Alex, Scott, or Michelle.

**3.6.2 Positionality.** Hay (2005) defined positionality as a researcher's "social, locational, and ideological placement relative to the research project or to other participants in it" (p. 290). Glesne (2011) argued that researchers could not control their positions as researchers vis-à-vis study participants, because their positions were determined by the relationships themselves. Researcher and participant identities interact in different ways. For example, race, gender, class, sexuality, socioeconomic status, religion, and other personal factors may influence "researcher" and "participant" identities (Glesne, 2011).

In examining my positionality in terms of my relationships with participants in this study what comes to mind first is my sexual identity. I interviewed individuals who identify as L, G, B, T, and/or Q. However, I do not identify with any of those labels. I have experienced same-sex attraction at different times in my life and have desired a relationship with another woman on a few occasions but have always chosen to not pursue that path for a multitude of reasons. I live a heterosexual lifestyle, but I do not identify as "heterosexual" or "straight." Nor do I identify as L, G, B, T, or Q. Personally, I am uncomfortable with labels for myself but am not bothered by others who choose to use them.

Morrow and Messinger (2006) defined gender identity "an individual's personal sense of identity as masculine or feminine, or some combination thereof" (p. 8). This is not to be confused with gender expression, which they define as "how a person outwardly manifests, or expresses, gender" (p. 8). At birth, I was assigned the sex of "female." I

identify as a cisgender woman, and my gender expression is generally in line with what is generally accepted within contemporary U.S. society as “feminine.” According to Johnson (2012), “the concepts of cisgender and cissex are designed to disrupt gendered normativity and were coined to resist the way that ‘woman’ or ‘man’ can mean ‘nontransgendered woman’ or ‘nontransgendered man’ by default” (p. 137-138). By identifying as cisgender, I benefit from cis-privilege, which is afforded to those whose assignment, gender identity, and gender expression align with socially-sanctioned gender categories—for example, an infant body assigned “female” at birth by hospital staff, later in childhood and adulthood experienced as “female” and expressed or presented as “feminine.”

Participants may see my husband, who identifies as a man, and me around campus, or may even choose to find information about me on social media websites. They will see that I am living my life with a man. I have no qualms about sharing my personal feelings about my own assignment, identity, identification, and sexuality, and self-disclosed this information at the beginning of each focus group.

**3.6.3 Insider and Outsider Statuses.** Being an insider means sharing similar cultural characteristics with participants, while being an outsider means not sharing similar cultural characteristics (Ganga & Scott, 2006; Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad 2010). Researchers who shared characteristics with participants such as “culture, gender, race, socio-economic class and so on” (Merriam et al., 2010, p. 406) were seen by participants as having insider status through the commonality of identities. However, researchers who did not share the same identities with participants were seen by participants as outsiders. Merriam et al. (2010) argued that

one was not singularly an insider or outsider, and that one was constantly negotiating insider/outsider status.

I grew up surrounded by people in LGBTQ communities, as three of my family members (my aunt, grandfather, and my mother) and countless friends identify as belonging to LGBTQ identities. Therefore, I already know much of the cultural context in which LGBTQ individuals live in the South. I am accustomed to the language used in LGBTQ-friendly spaces, and can participate in conversation about LGBTQ issues easily. As such my identity between insider and outsider is blurred. This blurring happens, because I am able to speak confidently and from a place of experience about LGBTQ issues and cultures as an insider would, even though I do not identify as L, G, B, T, or Q. The latter, non-LGBTQ identity makes me an outsider. Also, I am comfortable discussing sexuality in an interpersonal, informal way, because I was raised in a household where sex was seen as a normal part of human nature, and not as something that should be shameful. I hope that these qualities assisted me in making my participants feel more at ease with discussing their identities and experiences with me.

Another aspect of insider/outsider status is my identity as a graduate student, as both undergraduate and graduate students will be invited to participate in the study. Being a graduate student positions me in interesting ways. I am a student, and therefore, similar to those whom I will interview at SRU. Being a student positions me as an insider. My graduate student identity separates me as an outsider, too. Although I am similar to the SRU graduate students who may participate in the study, I am different from the undergraduates who may participate in the study. At SRU where I have taught courses in the field of foundations of education, research methods, and classroom assessment to

undergraduates and graduates, most students have positioned me as an instructor, or “a professor.” At SRU once an undergraduate student who had never enrolled in any of the courses that I taught came to speak to me about some issues she faced as a transgender lesbian student on USC’s campus. She and I had met a few times before through my attendance at LGBT student organization meetings and through my involvement with activities hosted by USC’s feminist student organization. She asked me a few questions about campus resources, and then said, “Sometimes I forget that you are a student – I see you as a professor.” While the statement made me feel wonderful, as I hoped to one day become a professor, it also made me feel strangely disconnected. This was the first time that I truly felt like an outsider to undergraduates on campus. Undergraduates may be less comfortable in discussing their experiences with me. Consequently, I was conscious of building rapport with all my participants at SRU with the hope of putting them at ease.

As I reflected on my insider/outsider roles and statuses, I considered the role that social class plays as well. SRU is a four-year IHE, designated by the Carnegie Foundation as a research one university. I along with all the other students who attend SRU must have enough money to pay tuition, with or without access financial aid. I have always considered my upbringing to be middle class. As I was growing up, my mother worked as a department manager in a grocery store and my father worked as a land and property surveyor. Neither of their professions benefitted from particularly high salaries, but I never went hungry or felt insecure about our family’s financial means. However, I have had two professors correct me about my middle class ascription and tell me that I grew up in a lower class family. I expect many of the participants from SRU will have similarly classed backgrounds.



As mentioned in Chapter 1, SRU is a PWI. I identify as white, like almost 80% of the student body at SRU (SRU admissions website, 2015). My whiteness positions me as both insider as most participants are likely to be white (insider) and an outsider, as one participant of color joined my focus groups. As discussed in Chapter 2, individuals who identify as people of color and as LGBTQ have different experiences than white LGBTQ students (Carter, 2013; Mitchell & Means, 2014; Rankin, 2003; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005; Rhoads, 1994).

Another aspect of my identity that I considered in insider/outsider roles and statuses is my identity as a southerner. I have lived in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia during the course of my life. I was raised in a conservative southern family. The entirety of my extended family resided in rural North Carolina. My family is extremely conservative, religiously, socially, and politically. As I was growing up, my extended family taught me the importance of traditional gender roles; how a wife must serve God and her husband. For example, my grandmother worries about me, because I teach young men and young women. She has explained to me that I am defying biblical norms by teaching men. At family events if politics are addressed, family members refer to Fox News and discuss how President Obama is the anti-Christ. "Surely," I have heard them share, "he will bring the apocalypse." All members of my family are white. Many speak negatively of people of color and proudly display the Southern Cross, or what most people refer to as the confederate flag. They tout "heritage, not hate" as explanation.

Study participants may or may not identify as southern as certainly not every student who attends SRU hails from the South. Some may identify as a northerner, a midwesterner, or other regional or geographical identity. Participants may not identify

with a region at all. Some participants may not be from the United States. Student enrollment at SRU is comprised of 65% in-state students and 35% out-of-state students (SRU admissions website, 2015).

In 2014, SRU's international student enrollment was over 1,000 (SRU International Student Services website, 2015). The intersection of international student identity and language addresses another status for me: language. I studied Spanish for 7 years and Japanese for 3 years, but I remain comfortable only in using English conversationally due to my lack of experience conversing in Spanish and Japanese. When working with LGBTQ students who are international students, too, I must consider multiple aspects of their identity and their affects in their experiences on campus. I am an outsider for potential participants who grew up outside the U.S. and for whom English is not a first language.

I considered my status as insider/outsider in relation to religious affiliation as well. My family members identify as "Christian" and are very religious. They reflect many ideals of the Bible Belt and are politically and socially conservative because of their religious beliefs. I was raised in Baptist churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. Because of my history with protestant Christianity, I am comfortable discussing religion from this sect of Christianity and can use language and euphemisms from this culture. I can, therefore, be an insider with other protestant Christians, but I will be an outsider to those who are not Christian.

Finally, I considered ability and ableism in my status as insider/outsider. Rauscher and McClintock (1996) defined ableism as

a pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional and physical disabilities . . . Deeply rooted beliefs about health, productivity, beauty, and the value of human life, perpetuated by the public and private media, combine to create an environment that is often hostile to those whose physical, mental, cognitive, and sensory abilities ... fall out of the scope of what is currently defined as socially acceptable. (p. 198)

I experience social privilege due to my ableism (Rauscher & McClintock, 1996). I would have an outsider status with potential participants who identify as or who have been identified as disabled. To my knowledge, no focus group participants were disabled, though I did not ask if they were.

### **3.7 Ontological and Epistemic Orientations**

Ontology refers to the nature of reality (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000; Grix, 2002). Shuuf and Sandfort (2000) defined ontological paradigms as those that question what any individual person can know about reality, as well as what the nature of reality is itself. I believe that reality is only true as each individual sees it and experiences it. Additionally, I do not believe that there is a larger truth within the world outside that which is true for an individual. I believe that individuals construct knowledge based on what they understand as true from their perceptions and experiences. This belief is what Grix (2002) named constructivism. Grix defined constructivism as

[A]n alternative ontological position that ‘asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision. (p. 177)

I do not believe in objectivism – that there is one reality or set meaning, independent of social constructions (Grix, 2002). I do not believe it is possible to be objective in any sense. Consequently, interpretivist paradigms (Golafshani, 2003) in qualitative research resonate with me. Most interpretivist theorists believe that there is no one true nature of reality, and that instead researchers must strive to interpret how each individual interprets and defines their reality. Adopting social constructivist and interpretivist positions in my research means that I strove to understand how my participants describe their experiences (their reality), and utilized member checking to ensure that I represented their reality as they saw it.

Epistemology is defined as “the relationships between the knower and what can be known” (Shuuf & Sandfort, 2000 p. 217), and focuses on the nature of knowledge (Allison & Pomeroy, 2000). I believe that examining how each person constructs knowledge is important in understanding each person’s subjectivities, because how one interprets the existence of reality can affect how one sees the world. I do not wonder if the students I interviewed claim “truths” about what they know. I believe that the “truth” each student constructs exists within her or his own reality. My responsibility as the researcher is to learn what his or her reality is and report it.

My academic background shapes and informs my ontological and epistemic orientations. I was introduced to the field of social research while an undergraduate student in a heavily quantitative sociology program. There, I learned to value numbers and generalizability. At that time, I had a positivist sense of reality. Numbers stuck with me through my masters’ work in sociology and educational research. However, I began to question positivist epistemologies as a doctoral student in foundations of education and

women's and gender studies courses. Faculty in both of these departments were devoted to qualitative research, and presented excellent reading materials concerning generalizability and statistical significance – two foundational components of research that I had held onto for years. Weekly conversations in my classes caused me to doubt my belief in these concepts. For example, a professor once asked in my feminist methodologies and epistemologies class why a response rate of 30% was seen as substantial and therefore, generalizable. She made me question what the other 70% of non-respondents would have to say, and why they might not have participated in the survey to which she was referring. Her inquiry pulled the linchpin from my commitment to positivist epistemologies. It began the downfall of my resolute, unblinking faith in the quantitative process. Now I find myself trying to balance my love for statistical exploration with my drive to understand the depth and personal experience that only qualitative, interpretivist research can give me. I experience positivism (and therefore, statistical explorations) to be incredibly comforting and rewarding, and I struggle with the holes that have now been punched into my epistemic perspective.

### **3.8 Study Significance and Implications**

A few years ago, a position was filled at Southern Research University for the director of the LGBT Resource Center on campus. This position had remained unfilled for many months. I had applied for the position myself and was told by an assistant in another student affairs department that the “university [was] not in a hurry to fill the position,” that it was “not important to them.” He expressed that he knew they would get around to it eventually, but that they were “not even really looking at applications.” Once the new director was finally hired, I contacted her to inform her that I lived in the area

and that I was available to help in any capacity I could. I shared, too, my previous experience in co-conducting a LGBT climate study at ECU in North Carolina. She was excited by the prospect of assistance from someone with a background in research methodologies, especially, because she was uncomfortable with performing research herself. Almost immediately we began working on creating a campus climate study for SRU. She felt that the study would enable her to perform her duties as the director of the LGBT Resource Center in a more efficient way – using campus data to inform her decision-making.

After two months of hard work, the survey was created and checked for construct validity by faculty at SRU and UNC-Wilmington who conduct LGBTQ research. In the meantime, the director of the LGBT Resource Center at SRU approached her supervisors. Tragically, her supervisors refused the administration of the survey. Higher administrators ordered her not to proceed—ignoring the survey’s potential practicability. The Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) attempted to appeal to our sympathies, but stated that he believed that LGBTQ individuals did not need their own climate study, that instead, the division was considering a university-wide climate study—one that would reach all “multicultural students.” No such survey was administered in 2013-2014, nor in 2014-2015. At the time of this writing, no survey has been discussed for 2015-2016.

When I spoke with the director in the fall of 2014, she shared that Susan Rankin (1998; 2003; 2005), who had conducted campus climate studies in 14 IHEs (see Chapter 2), had been invited to conduct a climate study at Southern Research University. The director was very excited. By spring 2015 nothing had happened. When I contacted the

director she informed me that her superiors had not followed through with their promise, and that there were no plans to conduct a climate study in the future.

The university's failed promises ignited my frustration. The division's justification for not having a LGBTQ-focused climate study, (and instead combining the LGBT population with all "multicultural " populations) felt like an attempt at erasure. The subsequent commitment to a survey conducted by Rankin (1998; 2003; 2005) seemed promising. However, two years after the director and I created the initial survey, SRU had failed to collect any data.

Scully and Segal (2002) theorized that grassroots groups that form in order to seek social justice and challenge the status quo of an organization are critical to achieving change. They argued, "these groups have been identified as being a critical component in the process of collective action in part because they heighten the shared sense of injustice" (p. 132). While the office that houses the CDO is a powerful source of shared senses of injustice, the CDO at SRU refused to collect information that might lead to more inclusive practices and policies. Scully and Segal (2002) posited that "these groups may avoid large-scale actions for fear of being censured or even expelled from the corporation if their actions are seen as too radical or pose too great a threat to management" (p. 132-133). Scully and Segal shared that the chance for success in social justice work increases when an individual in a management position (in this case, an administrator in higher education) serves as an advocate. In this situation, the CDO's refusal may have been grounded in fears of retaliation from conservative state legislators who in other states have reduced budget lines to universities that have supported LGBTQ students (e.g., Culp-Ressler, 2013; Margolin, 2014)

I have decided to pursue this study at SRU due to the hardships I know personally LGBTQ students endure there and due to the inaction of the Chief Diversity Officer. Moreover, such nonaction contrasts deeply with NASPAs (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) characterization of the support student affairs administrators ought to provide for students in higher education:

Opportunities for teaching and development exist everywhere and at all times on campus and it's our job to seize these moments. And as student affairs professionals our job is to foster and promote these interactions. Encouraging an understanding and respect for diversity, a belief the worth of individuals, and supporting our students in their needs are just some of the core concepts of the profession. (<https://www.naspa.org/about/student-affairs>)

Both the personal experiences of LGBTQ students and the refusal by SRU's Chief Diversity Officer to conduct a climate survey informed my decision to initiate this research. This research is much needed at SRU and in the region. Information from this research will benefit the director of the LGBT Resource Center, the division of student affairs at SRU, and students attending SRU. Identifying the problem areas and the spaces in which LGBTQ students feel unsafe and/or exposed to intolerance allows the director to better address their concerns. Moreover, the findings allow her to identify and acknowledge the spaces on campus where LGBTQ students feel nurtured and celebrated (for example, the LBGT SRO annual picnic; Please see Chapter 4).

On a broader level, this study contributes to the ongoing conversation in higher education about campus climate issues. As mentioned in Chapter 2 there was nothing currently available on outness and campus climate specifically for students attending



PWIs in the South. Although statistical analyses did not reveal correlations across outness and campus climate perceptions, data reflected that over 80% of survey respondents actively attempt to pass as straight in order to maintain comfort on campus.

### **3.9 Advantages and Disadvantages of My Study Design**

**3.9.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Focus Groups.** The interaction that can occur in focus groups can benefit researchers (Blackstone, 2012; Krueger & Casey, 2000). In focus groups, conversation about unanticipated topics may unfold through the group discourse that may not have arisen otherwise – including topics that did not occur to the researcher (Blackstone, 2012). Observation of the interaction across multiple people can be incredibly helpful in understanding social phenomena, because observing interaction across multiple people allows the researcher to understand how experiences and perceptions are communicated, discussed, and defended (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This was certainly the case within focus groups for my study – discussions around Greek Life and passing privilege in particular were especially productive. These were topics that I did not have originally on my focus group protocol but that were discussed in every focus group after participants addressed them organically.

One disadvantage of focus groups is that focus groups – just like any other qualitative research – can be time consuming when compared with quantitative work (Blackstone, 2012). Further, when addressing focus group dynamics, Blackstone (2012) argued that one or two participants could dominate the group discussion, thus silencing the others. I was trained – through courses taken during my program – in moderation techniques to lessen the chances of this happening. I shared guidelines with students at the beginning of the focus groups that included possible interruptions on my part in order

for everyone to be heard on a particular matter. However, in practice, I struggled with interrupting participants. For example, in the second focus group, Rachel dominated the discussion. I felt that I was not in a place where I could interrupt her, because she was sharing such painful experiences. Also, I struggled with the idea of being respectful – something my southern socialization instilled deeply within me – and therefore, did not use interruptions as often as I should have. Rachel’s dominance of the second focus group meant that I did not collect as much data about Justin’s or Paloma’s experiences. I used positive reinforcement and directive cues to facilitate the discussion more so in the first focus group, for example, “Thank you for sharing, (name). Let’s hear from someone else.” I paid attention, too, to shy participants who did not speak up as much (Krueger & Casey, 2000). When I noticed this happening, I asked the quiet individual directly for her or his opinion. This practice did not benefit me as much as I thought it would during the first focus group, as Sara continued to not speak as much. I think the lack of positive feedback within the first focus group led me to subconsciously not pursue it in the second and third focus groups. Other participants may ramble; Krueger and Casey (2000) recommended breaking eye contact with such a participant in order to send a non-verbal signal that you would like to move on. Though I tried this practice in the second focus group, it did not appropriately signal to Rachel that I wished to move on to other participants, or she chose to continue sharing her stories, instead.

**3.9.2 Advantages and Disadvantages of Surveys.** Surveys are a relatively cheap and easy method for collecting large amounts of data from different populations (Blackstone, 2012; Fowler, 2014). Conducting surveys through the Internet is a particularly cost-efficient choice when conducting research (Fowler, 2014). Researchers

who use survey methodologies benefit also from a social acceptance of surveys, which often appear reliable due to the standardization of questions (Blackstone, 2012).

Typically, policymakers perceive survey research as generalizable, which increases the possible practicability of survey results (Blackstone, 2012; Collins, 2012).

The disadvantages of survey research are coupled with their inherent design, which in some contexts are the advantages of the methodology. While researchers benefit from the standardization afforded to surveys, they suffer from them, too. Respondents must be able to easily read and respond to items. Sometimes, researchers who create easily readable items can suffer from an inability to gain deeper, richer information from respondents (Blackstone, 2012). Surveys are relatively inflexible as well. In practice this means that once participants begin generating data, if researchers realize that a question is confusing or is being misunderstood, researchers cannot always change the question (Blackstone, 2012). I did not feel that any questions were confusing or misunderstood during or after data collection.

### **3.9.3 Advantages and Disadvantages to Mixed-Methods Research.**

Commonly, researchers choose mixed-methods research, because they believe that mixed methods approaches allows for multiple perspectives in understanding a problem (Creswell, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Patton, 2002). For example, Hesse-Biber (2010) discussed the usefulness of conducting focus groups before surveys when describing a study in which researchers collected information from employees before sending out a survey to an entire office. Using focus groups to guide survey construction assisted the researchers in understanding the cultural context in which the numbers were reported. Similarly, I conducted focus groups in order to assess the complexity of LGBTQ

students' experiences on this campus. Having such understandings about LGBTQ student's experiences allowed me to better understand the possible larger patterns in the survey results. The use of mixed-methods research allowed me to use the concepts of triangulation and complementarity as well. I address both below in section 3.11.

On the other hand, mixed-methods research can be incredibly time consuming and difficult (Hesse-Biber, 2010). According to Hesse-Biber (2010), many researchers spend the majority of their efforts on qualitative or quantitative research, and mixing with the other approach can prove difficult if one is not experienced in both approaches. In this case, I felt that I spent a majority of my efforts on qualitative research, as I struggled to appropriately represent the data. This is due to my higher familiarity with quantitative research, as I felt as though survey analyses were more straightforward. It is still my hope that this will be the first of many mixed-methods studies I complete during my career.

### **3.10 Reliability, Validity, and Trustworthiness**

#### **3.10.1 Notions of Validity and Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research.**

According to Glesne (2011), many qualitative researchers use the concept of trustworthiness in order to claim that their work is plausible or credible. To establish trustworthiness, I utilized triangulation, construct validity, member checking, reflection upon my own subjectivity, and the utilization of rich, thick description (Glesne, 2011). Each of these concepts are defined in this subsection, with the exception of reflection of my own subjectivity. I addressed my subjectivities above in section 3.7.1, 3.7.2, and 3.7.3.

For this study, triangulation will not be used in the positivist sense, and is not an attempt to validate the data collected (Creswell, 2012). Instead, I will use triangulation as

a method to “understand the multiple perspectives available” (Glesne, 2011, p. 47). Lather (1986) defined triangulation as the use of multiple sources for data collection to establish “data trustworthiness” (p. 67). I built credibility in my study by using different methods and collecting different types of data (Hesse-Biber, 2010; Patton, 2002). Lather (1986) argued that often in “theoretically guided empirical work” (p. 67) researchers pursue confirmation of theoretical relevance. To work against this tendency, she recommended “systematized reflexivity” (p. 67). A systematized reflexivity, which gives some indication of how a priori theory has been “changed by the logic of the data, becomes essential in establishing construct validity in ways that will contribute to the growth of illuminating and change-enhancing social theory” (p. 67). Consistently reflecting in my research journal was one way I practiced systematized reflexivity. In addition, introducing theorists who inform my work and noting my commitments to a feminist politics and my prejudices against multiple privileges were ways to mark my orientations at the outset of the study. Reflecting on my epistemological and ontological orientations and my subjectivities allowed me to identify my academic and personal identities as well. This process of reflection then allowed me to work against the political, personal, and professional presuppositions I have. During analyses and the production of Chapter 4, I consistently engaged in thoughtful reflection about my own presuppositions. Also, I discussed my ideas with others in order to ensure that my presuppositions were not driving my analysis.

I pursued the claim of face validity as well (Lather, 1986). Lather described face validity as recursive member checking. Member checking is the process of sharing transcripts, data, analysis and results, with participants. Researchers who use member

checking invite participants to sanction the accuracy of her or his representations. Some researchers include participants in the process of analysis (Lather, 1986). I wanted to member check with participants about analysis, too. Therefore, as I analyzed my data, I checked with participants to ensure that I understand their experiences by sending them segments of the analysis in order to ensure that I had properly represented their perspectives. I would not be doing my research justice if I did not ensure that my understandings of LGBTQ students' experiences and interpretations resonated with my participants. Member checking increases credibility and trustworthiness of my representations and interpretations (Glesne, 2011). As of October 2015, all focus group participants have responded to my requests for member checking analysis as represented in Chapter 4 except for Michelle, Alex, and Scott.

Finally, using thick, rich description simply means representing information from participants in great detail (Glesne, 2011). In order to address this, I utilized in vivo coding and representations of detailed LGBTQ students' experiences at SRU.

**3.10.2 Notions of Reliability and Validity in Quantitative Research.** In quantitative research, reliability means that "individual scores from an instrument should be nearly the same or stable on repeated administrations of the instrument and that they should be free from sources of measurement error and consistent" (Creswell, 2012, p. 627). Reliable surveys provide consistent measures of important characteristics (Fink, 2012). Closed-response survey questions are generally more reliable than open-ended questions, as data provided are uniform and easy to interpret (Fink, 2012). Due to this, I used mostly closed-ended, multiple choice questions on the survey portion of my study.

Further, the following item writing guidelines were followed to ensure that a survey is reliable: (1) each question should be singular and meaningful, (2) standard language rules (grammar, spelling) should be used at all times, and (3) biased words, phrases, and jargon should be avoided (Babbie, 2004; Creswell, 2012; Fink, 2012; Fowler, 2014). Practicing good survey design increases the reliability of answers, as there is less room for misinterpretation or mistakes (Fowler, 2014).

There are several forms of reliability evidence. For this study, I utilized internal consistency. Internal consistency examines “how well different items complement each other in their measurement of the same quality or dimension” (Fink, 2012, p. 66). This is measured via a test called Cronbach’s alpha. An alpha of .7 or higher is needed in order to achieve adequate reliability to compare groups. For my study, internal consistency was measured and evaluated because it was the most appropriate given my aims.

In quantitative research validity refers to “the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores for proposed uses of tests” (AERA, 2014, p. 11). Validation requires that researchers obtain sufficient evidence to provide a basis for score interpretations. One of the easiest ways to approach validation evidence is to have a rival (or null) hypothesis to challenge the proposed interpretation. A null hypothesis is the opposite of a stated hypothesis (AERA, 2014). If a researcher can find evidence to support her or his null hypothesis, or if a researcher cannot find sufficient evidence to reject it, the researcher cannot validly consider the proposed interpretation (AERA, 2014). For example, one hypothesis in this study is that LGBTQ students do not feel safe on campus. The rival (or null) hypothesis would be that LGBTQ students feel

safe on campus. Unfortunately, I was not able to find sufficient evidence to reject my null hypotheses.

***Sources of Validity Evidence.*** The aspects of validity I examined in this study are content validity, internal structure, and convergent and discriminant validity evidence. I sought content-oriented evidence for validity, involving “careful review of the construct and test content domain by a diverse panel of experts” (AERA, 2014, p. 15). This process required experts in survey methodology, in this case my dissertation committee co-chair, Dr. Robert Johnson, to assess my instrument before I sent it to potential participants. Dr. Johnson reviewed the format of the items, response scales, and the overall instrument. In terms of the content validity of the instrument, I consulted Dr. Emily Greytak from GLSEN, and the director of the LGBT Resource Center at SRU. These individuals were asked to review the instrument in order to ensure that questions align with existing literature and issues within the field of LGBT studies. The director of the LBTSRO suggested that I change “sexuality” to “sexual orientation” throughout the instrument, as well as “perceived or known sexuality/gender identity” to “perceived or actual sexuality/gender identity.” Dr. Greytak suggested that I improve the instrument’s language in order to be more straightforward, as it was not always clear that I was specifically looking for responses from LGBTQ students. I followed their advice and updated the instrument’s language.

Fowler (2014) suggested that instrument questions be as reliable as possible. Further, he suggested that multiple questions be asked which measure the same subjective state in order to create a scale that increases the validity of the data gained. Researchers create scales to look for similar answers to similar questions in order to look



for reliability evidence. I followed all guidelines for writing good questions as mentioned above to increase the reliability of my instrument. I used multiple questions to measure the same domain by creating domain scores and a total scale score as well. For example, multiple questions were asked concerning school safety. The following are only three of these examples;

- (1) How safe do you feel when walking alone on campus?
- (2) How safe do you feel when inside of your residence hall?
- (3) How safe do you feel when inside campus bathrooms?

These questions, along with others that measure safety, were a part of a “safety” scale. I used a Likert scale to capture responses that will range from one to four, with one meaning “very unsafe” and four meaning “very safe.” I used individual questions relating to safety to create a composite variable. After creating a composite variable, I had a scale that included all safety scores. I followed similar procedures for the other domains represented on the survey.

Finally, I am interested in pursuing consequential validity, though I will not be able to do so at this time. Consequential validity refers to the benefit or the detriment from the use of an instrument (Messick, 1988). I would like to examine the positive and negative social consequences that arise due to this study’s completion in a future study.

**3.10.3 Combining and Mixing Methods.** Employing multiple sources for data collection allowed me to triangulate my data (Glesne, 2011; Golafshani, 2003; Hesse-Biber, 2010; Patton 2002). Through this action, I was able to comprehend a variety of viewpoints (Glesne, 2011). First, I pursued methods triangulation, which refers to the “use of more than one method while studying the same research question in order to

examine the same dimension of a research problem” (Hesse-Biber, 2010). Through the use of triangulation, I examined the possible convergence of my findings, and thus enhance my credibility.

Utilizing mixed-methods in my research design enabled me to strive for complementarity, which

[A]llows the researcher to gain a fuller understanding of the research problem and/or to clarify a given research result. This is accomplished by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data and not just the numerical or narrative explanation alone to understand the social story in its entirety. Both complementarity and triangulation are useful for cross-validation when multiple methods produce comparable data. (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p. 4)

I used complementarity between focus groups and the survey instrument in order to examine campus climate.

### **3.11 Confidentiality**

I have taken steps during the data collection and analyses stages to protect the confidentiality of my participants and ensure that their identities are not tied to representation of data. As with any other human subjects research, a breach of confidentiality is always a risk (Blackstone, 2012; Coles & McGrath, 2010; Roulston, 2011). In order to reduce this risk, I have not utilized signed consent forms. Instead, I provided invitational letters and consent forms that explain the research process without needing a signature, which is consistent with the SRU’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (SRU IRB, personal communication, May 11, 2015). In no place where data are stored

electronically or physically did I use participant names. Finally, I used pseudonyms for all participants.

### **3.12 Instruments**

Please see Appendices A and E for my focus group protocol and survey instrument, respectively.

## CHAPTER 4:

### THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF FOCUS GROUPS

#### 4.1 Introduction

I conducted focus groups in order to answer the first part of my research question; “How do LGBTQ students who are “out” describe their lives at Southern Research University? In this chapter I represent data from the three focus groups I completed with nine SRU students. I conducted focus groups in order to answer the first part of my research question; “How do Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning students describe the effects of being “out” on their lives at Southern Research University?” In the focus groups two participants identified as cisgender males, five as cisgender females, one as transgender female, and one as gender queer. Four participants identified as lesbian, two as gay, two as bisexual, and one as pansexual<sup>18</sup>. One participant was Black, while the rest were white. Four undergraduate students and five graduate students participated in the three focus groups (Please see Appendix G for a table that displays information about focus group participants).

I represent three themes in the sections below: (1) outness, (2) passing privilege, and (3) affirmation. I discuss a collection of salient points concerning campus climate, too. I include sub-themes or salient points under each theme. I represent salient points,

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<sup>18</sup> Cavendish (2010) posited, “pansexuals believe that a person can develop physical attraction, love, and sexual desire for people regardless of their gender identity or biological sex” (p. 593).

because many informed my construction of the survey instrument. Salient points are data found during first and second cycle coding which are “essence-capturing” (Saldaña, 2012, p. 3). Salient points are different than subthemes, as they do not reflect saturation of data. The points were not shared across most participants. However, I have included them, because I find them to be important additions. In each section below I detail their inclusion. After I represent each theme, I represent relevant salient points. Under the theme “campus climate” I represent a subtheme that I argue reflects important understandings of SRU’s overall campus climate. Finally, I represent a salient point concerning LGBTQ experiences in the South.

As I shared in Chapter 2, the six campus climate domains provided by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2013) informed my study. In addition to GLSEN’s six campus climate domains, I wanted to collect the perspectives from LGBTQ students who were enrolled at SRU to augment GLSEN’s standard items. I have organized each section below by first representing the data gathered from the focus groups, and then examining the scholarly research surrounding each theme. In the final section, I discuss the questions that were added to the survey after each analysis.

#### **4.2 Theme 1: Outness**

As discussed in Chapter 2, coming out is a constant process, as individuals must constantly negotiate to whom she, sie, or he may be out and when she, sie, or he may come out, dependent on the space, time, relationships, and each individual circumstance (GLSEN 2013; Mayo, 2007; Rankin, 2003). Each of the nine participants discussed coming out or being out. Denise, AJ, and Michelle each shared that they were completely out within their departments on campus. For example, Denise, a white lesbian who is a

Ph.D. student in history, shared, “I’m out to most of my colleagues, the other graduate students, and my professors and such.” Alex, a white undergraduate student who identifies as genderqueer and pansexual, stated specifically that they<sup>19</sup> are,

Aggressively out on campus so that someone else doesn’t have to be. Kind of like doing it for the community, like, if I’m so out, I might make that person more comfortable to be out on campus if they see someone be more.

Rachel, Justin, and Paloma each shared that their outness was on a “need to know” basis.

**4.2.1 Salient points related to outness.** I coded five salient points about outness while analyzing the focus group data. The points are (a) the process of coming out, (b) outness at home versus outness at school, (c) visibility: activism and presenting LGBTQ sexual orientations, (d) contexts of coming out, and (e) self-silencing in the classroom.

**4.2.a The process of coming out.** Four participants, AJ, Michelle, Rachel, and Sara, discussed the process of coming out. AJ, a white lesbian seeking her Ph.D. in political science, stated, “And I think the process of coming out is like always happening, like when you enter a new group of friends or a new job, you’re constantly doing it.” Similarly, Rachel, a white trans lesbian earning her B.A. in computer science, shared that coming out for her happens in “a lot of different stages.” She described these stages:

There’s a professional coming out, where I have to come out because my name at the time when I registered for classes was completely different than the name I went by... Then a lot of times, you know, [coming out with] the trans<sup>20</sup>-ness for

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<sup>19</sup> Alex prefers to be identified using “they” and “their” pronouns.

<sup>20</sup> Some individuals prefer to use “trans\*” (with an asterisk) versus “trans” (without an asterisk). I asked Rachel specifically if she had a preference for usage, to which she replied that “‘Trans\*’ I feel is alienating as it is like trying to incorporate non-binary individuals, but I do not feel that it does that very well... Some of my non-binary friends told me that it is not inclusive, and I am going by what they said.”

my identity was both necessary... for getting health care, for getting resources at the school... I felt like I was constantly having to [come out].

Mayo (2007) described coming out as a “process” (p. 82). LGBTQ individuals must constantly come out to new people or in new situations. Rachel illustrated Mayo’s point well with her description of coming out in “different stages.”

Sara, a white bisexual woman earning two B.A.s in Psychology and Biology, said, “I think ‘out’ is a really confusing term, because it's really hard to, I don't know, I think I'm like half in, half out sometimes. So, I don't know.” Sara’s quote is qualitatively different from those of AJ and Rachel, who focused on coming out as a process. Instead, Sara focuses on the meaning of “out.” Sara cites the use of “out” as confusing. Feeling “half in, half out sometimes” she critiques “out” for the implication of its universality. In other words, if one is “out” then he/she/they is/are out universally—all the time to everyone. Sara offers a critique of this notion.

Michelle, a white lesbian studying for her M.A. in higher education and student affairs, shared, “It's hard to say how long I've been out, because I've been out to random people for different amounts of time but I'm out, so, yeah, it's been a while.” In contrast to others, Michelle coupled the length of time she had been out to memories of coming out to “random people” at different points in time.

I included this salient point because of the connection to the literature. In Chapter 2, I shared that to whom one may be out and when one may come out depends on the space, time, relationships, and each individual circumstance (GLSEN 2013; Mayo, 2007; Rankin, 2003; Sedgwick, 1990). Each participant who discussed their outness did so with qualifiers indicating that each individual circumstance was considered. For Rachel,

Justin, and Paloma, coming out was considered on a “need to know” basis. Michelle shared that she has “been out to random people for different amounts of time.” Sara critiqued the notion of “being out” for its implication of universality.

**4.2.b Outness at home and outness at school.** Four participants, Sara, Michelle, Rachel, and AJ, drew comparisons between being out at home and being out on campus. Sara stated, “I think it’s easier to be out on campus then it is sometimes at home for me... my mom knows, but not my dad.” Michelle, who is from Indiana, agreed with her statement, and elaborated that she felt similarly because “[at home] everyone’s pretty racist and xenophobic, and homophobic, and transphobic, and pretty much everything you can think of.” Rachel shared that she was not out in high school, but that she remembers telling herself in high school that she would come out once she was in college. She reasoned that she could come out in college, because she would be away from her family and her community. She shared, “I’ll be away from my family, I’ll be away from the community here, and I can be myself.” AJ discussed coming out first at school, then at home. However, she stated that when she came out at home, her parents reacted by saying “We already knew that. We were waiting for you to know!”

As discussed in Chapter 2, Rhoads (1994) found that many LGBT students came out at school before coming out at home. Participants in Rhoads’s study described coming out on campus as being easier than coming out to their families. Rhoads’ (1994) work aligns with Sara’s statement about how it is “easier to be out on campus” and Rachel’s statement about waiting to come out until college. Due to what the participants shared I decided to ask participants to rate their outness at home as well as on campus on the survey (Please see Figure 4.1).



10.) How "out" do you consider yourself on campus?

1
2
3
4
5
6

Not at all out
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
Completely Out

11.) How "out" do you consider yourself in your personal life away from home?

1
2
3
4
5
6

Not at all out
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
Completely Out

Figure 4.1 – Questions about outness.

**4.2.c Visibility: Activism and presenting LGBTQ sexual orientations.** AJ, Sara, Alex, and Rachel discussed issues pertaining to visibility and visibility’s association with activism. AJ shared descriptions of both her activism and her presentation of a lesbian sexual orientation. AJ shared, “I mean I’m not carrying a flag or anything, but I mean, I walk around with my girlfriend, I mean, we hold hands.” Sara replied to AJ’s comment, and communicated how important engaging in social justice work was to her.

[I]t’s funny that you say you don’t carry flags, because I feel like I do that more than I’m out. I feel like I’m less out about my sexuality and more out about my drive for social justice, so you’re probably more likely to see me like carrying a flag at like, Pride<sup>21</sup>, rather than holding someone’s hand on campus.

Alex described their outness as being fueled by participation in highly visible activities and LGBTQ student organizations; “I do a lot of stuff with the LBTSU and Office of Multicultural Student Affairs office. I also do protesting things around campus so people

<sup>21</sup> Pride here refers to a local celebration of LGBTQ populations.

see me at that.” Above I shared that Alex self-identifies as “aggressively out so that someone else doesn’t have to be.” Alex’s activism is possible due in part to their comfort and commitment to visibility. Rachel identified first as an activist and then as a trans individual when first introducing herself; “I do a bunch of activism. I started a trans group. Oh, I identify as trans woman and a lesbian.”

Renn (2007), Renn and Bilodeau (2005), and Rhoads (1994), found that LGBTQ students with activist campus leadership roles were more likely to be out than students not in leadership roles. Rhoads (1994) documented that being out often meant becoming political for students on campus. Mayo (2007) discussed that some students are out because they are trying to actively disrupt the status quo.

I included this salient point in order to illustrate the relationship between outness and activism, as demonstrated by Renn (2007), Renn and Bilodeau (2005), and Rhoads’s (1994) findings. The point directly influenced my survey design. Due to the presence of this salient point, along with the findings in the literature surrounding the topic, I decided to add the questions in Figure 4.2 to the survey.

11.) Would you consider yourself an activist?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe your role as an activist.

[Large text box]

12.) Do you currently hold any leadership positions on campus?

If yes, please describe your role as a leader.

[Large text box]

*Figure 4.2 – Questions added due to findings around activism.*

**4.2.d Contexts of coming out.** Two participants, AJ and Rachel, shared portions of their decision-making process when considering whether or not they would come out to others on campus. AJ, who teaches courses in her doctoral program, described the decision-making process she goes through when deciding whether or not to come out to her students. She said,

When I teach classes I make my students take a political typology test to gauge kind of their politically ideologies at the beginning of the course and if the spectrum is more left-leaning, then I'll go ahead, and it will usually come out at some point during the course. But if it's right-leaning I usually won't say anything.

This quote aligns with Mayo's (2007) description of outness being dependent upon multiple contexts. In AJ's case, she contextualizes the political space in which she finds herself teaching before deciding whether or not to come out.

Rachel stated that she was scared when she decided to come out for the first time at SRU, describing it as "the most terrifying experience ever." Her fear was due to her surroundings at that time. She described being at the "gay picnic" held by the LGBTSRO at the beginning of the semester, and seeing an individual also attending the picnic who she had known but to whom she was not out in high school. Mayo (2007) might argue that Rachel assessed the context around her before making the decision to come out.

I included this salient point because the stories shared by AJ and Rachel were especially poignant as both refer to the significance of context in coming out.

**4.2.e Self-silencing in the classroom.** The final salient point I want to represent is about the practice of self-silencing. AJ and Michelle discussed interacting with

undergraduate students and making decisions about how much of themselves to share and how much not to share. While AJ teaches undergraduate courses, Michelle serves as a guest speaker in the university's Freshman 101<sup>22</sup> course. Both women shared that they were uncertain about what exactly they may or may not say to students concerning sexuality. AJ posited, "You want to tread lightly, because you don't want to sway them one way or the other, but you also want to be honest with them – or as honest as you can be in that role." Michelle agreed with AJ's statement, and also added that she was concerned about parental responses. "What can I say? What can I not? Because I'm not necessarily as worried about the students' response, but if a parent finds out, and they're coming back [asking], 'Who did you talk to about this?'"

AJ said that discussing LGBTQ issues in class was not her place as the instructor. Instead, she stated that she plays "devil's advocate," which keeps her students uncertain as to her own personal beliefs. She asserted that she believes her job is to "be kind of neutral." She did not believe that her department would approve of her discussing her sexual orientation in class and worried that doing so might cause her to receive negative course evaluations. However, AJ shared that she feels safe talking to students about her identity and experiences after a course was over, and they were no longer her students.

The intersections of identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer or questioning, with teaching responsibilities can be stressful at times. AJ summarized these tensions by saying,

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<sup>22</sup> Freshman 101 is a pseudonym for the course referenced here. Instructors in the course teach first semester undergraduate students about university life, resources, and culture.

It's hard being an ally, and a graduate student, and a professor all at the same time and identifying, because you have all these different roles piling at you – things that you should say. I wish they would give us more training on that.

AJ and Michelle discussed assessing each situational context when considering whether or not to come out to students. They are able to protect themselves from anti-LGBTQ students and parents by choosing not to come out in certain contexts. However, by not outing themselves due to fear of reprisal, AJ and Michelle choose to foreclose the opportunity to provide a safe space to LGBT students, as well as those who are questioning their sexuality.

During the member checking process, I reached out to AJ and Michelle about their “self-silencing.”<sup>23</sup> Specifically, AJ shared how teaching in the South has affected her decision to not come out to her students. She said,

I think teaching in the South has a lot to do with my decision to keep my sexuality under wraps, especially while teaching... Here at SRU, there is a certain discretion that I feel I have to maintain, both teaching my undergraduate students and generally existing on campus as a professor. However, if I lived outside of the South, say in Vermont or Portland, then it wouldn't be an issue at all. That isn't to say that SRU itself isn't always welcoming, but there is a certain level of discomfort here, especially when it comes to students and their thoughts about me simply because they know I'm lesbian, or of them potentially finding out that I am lesbian...I still don't show any public affection to my partner if we are on campus, even if we are just walking our dogs on a Saturday. That said, if I didn't

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<sup>23</sup> As of October 2015, Michelle had not replied to my email.

live in the South, I don't think I would be so closed off about sharing that I am lesbian with my students.

Personally, for me AJ's discomfort in sharing her sexuality is disheartening. Her concerns about being out to students or on campus in general in the South are well founded as I documented in Chapter 2. However, not being out means that students who are members of LGBTQ communities and questioning students miss opportunities to identify role models, support, and allies. Having visible LGBT faculty and staff on campus can improve campus climate, too (Evans, 2002). Evans (2002) argued for the importance of having visible LGBT faculty and LGBT-identified safe spaces on campus, stating that increased visibility of LGBT individuals on campus increased support for LGBT populations.

**4.2.2 Survey additions.** I used a six point scale to measure outness because outness is a not a static measure as demonstrated by my findings here.). I added questions in Figure 4.2 to measure outness for survey respondents (Please see Appendix E for the original survey construction prior to focus groups). I followed this by a question concerning respondent outness at home, as a few focus group participants discussed their outness at home versus at school. In addition, see Figure 4.1 for the addition regarding "Visibility: Activism and presenting LGBTQ sexual orientations."

### **4.3 Theme 2: Passing Privilege**

Although I did not ask directly about passing privilege in my focus group protocol, (Please see Appendix A), student participants addressed the topic in all three focus groups. Goffman (1963) defined passing as, "receiving and accepting treatment based on false suppositions concerning [oneself]... [or] the concealment of treatment

based on credible facts” (p. 42). The term “passing” has also been used by civil rights groups in the past to refer to individuals who could pass as white (Tarrow, 1994).

10.) How "out" do you consider yourself on campus?

1

2

3

4

5

6

Not at all out

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

Completely Out

11.) How "out" do you consider yourself in your personal life away from home?

1

2

3

4

5

6

Not at all out

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

Completely Out

Figure 4.3 – Questions about outness.

Sara described her own passing privilege to another participant by saying, “Where, like, I can go about my day-to-day life and people won’t ask me about my sexuality or like gender.” Michelle in the same focus group expanded upon what Sara said, and added, “Yeah, I mean, sexuality essentially is a completely invisible diversity, like, you can choose how you dress and people can make assumptions, but essentially it’s invisible.”

Sara, who stated above that she benefits from passing privilege, shared that her decision to come out is based on each conversation she has. She watches how her conversations unfold before coming out and relies on her passing privilege knowing she does not have to come out if she does not want to come out. When meeting and working with new people, she explained, “I don't know, but I mean it's also knowing who you're

talking to, too. So I don't come out immediately, or I guess I have passing privilege a lot of times so I just don't really make a big deal of it.”

Paloma, a white bisexual female working towards both an M.B.A. and an M.P.A., characterized her passing privilege as being relational through her participation in what appears to be a heteronormative marriage,

I also kind of feel like because I am a bisexual that's in a heterosexual marriage, I kind of get like a privilege that I can kind of like pass for straight a lot of the time. I mean, a lot of people assume that you are straight, that's kind of the default unless you do disclose to them. So, I mean like I'll be honest, I've totally used the straight privilege before, because you never know how people are going to react to information like that.

In her description of her own passing privilege Paloma explains that most people assume by default that individuals are heterosexual. Even though Paloma identifies as “bisexual” her bisexuality remains invisible to others unless she discloses to them, because she is married to a man. “A lot of people assume” she is “straight”, ignoring the possibility that she may be bisexual. Paloma shared, too, that she has “used” “straight privilege before” as a form of protection from possible anti-LGBTQ reactions.

Justin, a gay Black male earning his Ph.D. in educational research, explained that because his presentation of gender aligns with binary gender norms, he is able to pass. He said, “I present myself in a very masculine way... So I think a lot of people do assume that I am straight.”

Unlike Justin, participants who present themselves in gender nonconforming ways had different experiences. Rachel and Alex discussed the consequences they have



experienced, because they do not experience passing privilege. Rachel described life after she began “passing” as female during her sophomore year. From that point on, she explained, she was able to explore other aspects of her identity, such as her sexuality, more freely.

I think passing is a huge thing in coming out. Like the others [Paloma and Justin] have, you have this sort of [privilege]. So when I started passing better as female then there's that whole aspect of my sexuality and exploring [how sexuality ties into gender], and then coming out with [being a lesbian]. I'll never forget my sophomore year I was dating this girl and I was walking her to class and she kissed me, and this girl like behind us said, "Oh my God, I didn't know we had lesbians at our school”, and I just laughed. She said it in such a profoundly cute way I felt like, this is both adorable and also kind of awkward. I don't really know how I feel about this. I'm giggling on the inside, because this is a really cute moment. I'm glad she's so happy about it but then again it's kind of really weird.

The girl in Rachel's story who was surprised by the presence of lesbians on campus mirrors the individuals who assume that Paloma is straight due to her marriage to a man. The assumption that heterosexuality is the norm permeates the culture at SRU, just as it does within the United States (Sedgwick, 1990).

Alex discussed weaving in and out of “passing” due to their identity as being gender queer. They described their feelings about passing below.

[Safety] definitely takes on, like - the idea that passing is survival. So if you can pass in the straight world, then you're safe. But the minute you start wearing your queerness on your sleeve, you're no longer safe. You do get harassed... I mean

you do get shit said to you or like shit thrown at you... [Alex experienced having things thrown at them] on campus...Once you don't present as cis-normative, you're an object, and people feel like they can kind of do what they want with you. They feel like they can just touch you or like really make these astute statements about your appearance. So just from what I've experienced from presenting in a non-normative way, people, it almost dehumanizes you on campus. Again it's kind of a rare instance that that happens, but it does happen.

Alex's experiences of being objectified, insulted, and dehumanized reflect accounts documented by McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010). McGuire et al (2010) found that transgender students were more likely to experience violence at school than their LGB peers. Disseminating the findings of my research with student affairs professionals at SRU remains an important aim. Student Affairs professionals must address harassment, discrimination, and violence, and must further provide organizational and financial resources to support and affirm LGBTQ and gender non-conforming students on SRU's campus.

Renfrow (2004) expounded upon Goffman's definition of passing to include the categories of "gender, sexuality, social class, American citizenship, race, and numerous other identities" (p. 494), because an individual may pass in any of these categories. In his study on passing, Renfrow found that individuals,

[E]xplain passing and everyday passing primarily as attempts to avoid detection or to fit into a social group. Students use these strategies to gain access to arenas and social groups that would otherwise be formally or informally closed to them. These instances often involve strangers or acquaintances. Controlling personal

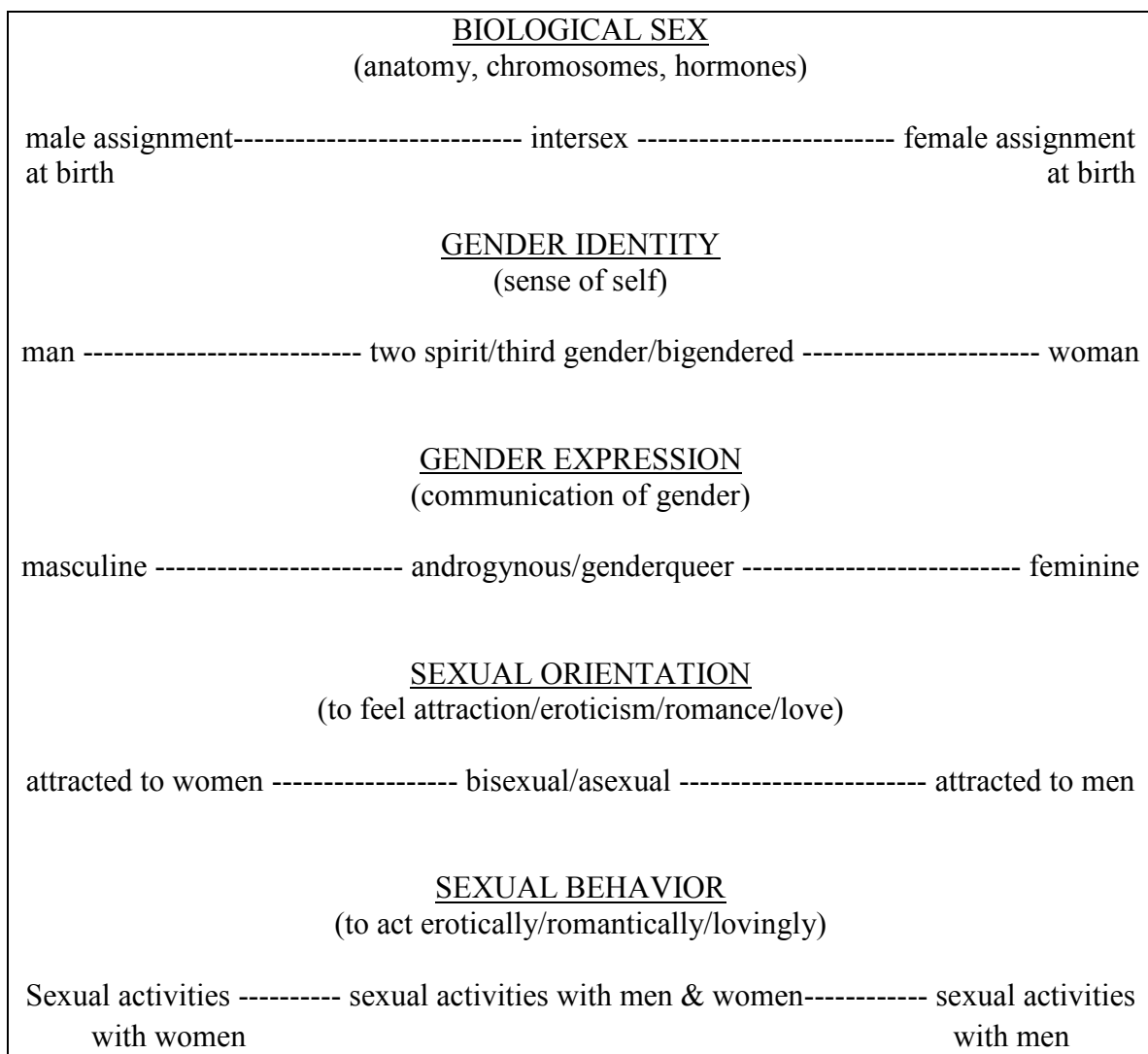
information among intimates is less common, thereby providing some support for Goffman's (1963) claim that individuals who pass must partition their world into regions with varying levels of information control. (p. 494)

When Michelle defined passing privilege for AJ, she touched on a very important distinction – the fact that many people make assumptions based on gender expression, leaving sexual orientation invisible. Craig (2007) and Butler (1998; 1990) discussed this phenomenon when describing lesbian women who present (or express) their gender in classically “feminine” ways. When people perceived as women present in “feminine” ways they receive messages of being socially accepted, because they reinforce binary gender norms and heteronormativity, both dominant in Western culture. Craig (2007) stated,

Femme women have passing privilege in that they frequently do not have to make drastic alterations to their appearance or behavior for others to assume they are heterosexual. Femme women do not appear to be very different on the surface from heterosexual women. They do not evoke the idea of lesbian and therefore easily pass as heterosexual in the workplace, in public, and in some cases unintentionally in social settings. (p. 8)

Craig addressed both the dominance of binary gender norms and heteronormativity and the tendency people have to collapse gender expression into sexual orientation— “femme women” do not “evoke the idea of lesbian” and therefore, pass. The tendency is common within society (Butler, 1990). Often one assumes another's sexual orientation based on gender expression. Working against such assumptions is important if communities are to understand the differences across assignment/biological sex, gender

identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and sexual behavior. In the focus groups participants defined passing privilege based on the assumptions that others were collapsing their gender expression into their sexual orientation. Figure 1, below, shows a series of sliding scales. I find the diagram helpful to consider when addressing distinctions across gender identity, expression, and sexual orientation and behavior. Representing such positions as scales works against binary positioning (Butler 1988; 1990; Sedgwick, 1990).



*Figure 4.4 – Diagram of sex and gender. (Note: This figure is from Anders and DeVita (in press). It was modified from Center for Gender Sanity (<http://www.gendersanity.com/>) and Baxter (2011)*

Each of the five scales demonstrates a different aspect of identity, expression, orientation, and behavior. For example, Paloma was assigned the identity of female at birth, her gender identity is a woman, and she expresses her gender in a feminine way; However, her sexual orientation is bisexual, and she participates in sexual activity with both men and women.

Rachel described her frustration with gender and sexuality being collapsed into a single category while discussing her coming out experiences. She addresses the tendency people have to anchor gender identity and expression with binary gender norms and to assume heteronormativity.

I also think that for trans individuals sexuality is overlooked in a lot of ways, and I think a lot of people also generally apply the idea of... gender identity within the binary, and then you also apply that [to] sexuality or whatever would be considered heterosexual, like, so [people assume] if you transition to female you must like guys, if you transition to male you must like women and they never really consider the fact that sexuality and gender identity are two separate things. Rachel parses important distinctions across gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. She critiques the assumption that gender identity and expression drive sexual attraction and orientation. Alex discussed also how sexuality and gender expression are often collapsed.

People like us when we're the polite queers, people like us when we're not protesting something, or we're not dressing in a way that doesn't conform to a binary. People really don't like it when we present in a way that they're not comfortable with. So, if I chose to wear all "boy clothes" but also wear a pair of

heels people flip. People just don't know what to do. I have people taking pictures of me like walking down the street. People following me but as long as I wear boy clothes, then I'm fine, because I look [like a boy]. I don't look like a queer person. But the minute I put on drag it's like people look away. They put on blinders and they try not to look. It's all in how you present, if you don't present in a way that is cis normative then I mean you're kind of fucked on campus to be honest—like it sucks.

Alex's statement demonstrates tension between individuals on campus looking at non-conforming individuals as spectacle, and looking away and "trying not to look." Alex refers, too, to his passing privilege when he shares, "I don't look like queer person". Indeed in the instances when they choose to transgress binary gender expression, Alex disrupts both binary gender identity and binary gender expression. Both Rachel and Alex shared how important it is to consider the fact that gender identity, expression, and sexuality are separate.

**4.3.a Avoidance and the use of symbolic language.** A salient point I want to represent in the larger issue of passing privilege is "avoidance and the use of symbolic language." Four participants; Sara, Michelle, AJ, and Justin, shared instances of using symbolic language in order to avoid potential discrimination on campus. For example, Sara shared that she knows how to avoid being asked questions about her sexuality.

I know going up to the question [about my sexuality] kind of like how to avoid people asking those questions, and kind of having to step around it because they will be asked, and just kind of like more so I know in advance that different phobias do exist in people. Like, erase your identity before you even get to like

come out to them kind of thing. So I don't know, I'm just kind of treading lightly before it even comes to that.

Here, Sara finds balance between two thought processes. First, she acknowledges that others may be uncomfortable with her identity as a bisexual woman and shares that she avoids discussing her sexuality in order to avoid making others feel uncomfortable. She does this by reading people to ascertain whether or not they have phobias and avoids disclosure until she can figure out to whom she is speaking and what kind of issues they might have. During member checking, she described this process as “Knowing how to read people and figure out what their response will be, and if that isn't possible, not saying anything at all as an act of self erasure for protective purposes.”

Sara erases her “identity” and avoids coming out until she can discern what kind of prejudices the person to whom she is speaking may have. Using “symbolic language” is one way other participants shared they practice discernment. As they share in excerpts below “symbolic language” can include non-verbal communication as well, for example, taking the form of dress. Shared symbolic language across LGBTQ communities makes this communication possible. Sara, Michelle, and AJ had an exchange where they explored different pieces of symbolic language. In this exchange, they coupled certain clothes and accessories with insider status to LGBTQ communities.

Sara: Yeah, I just gotta throw some flannel on for our first [department] group mixer. Yeah. My beanies.

Michelle: Some Chaco's.

Sara: Put my beanie on.

AJ: Some plaid in general.

Sara: Yeah then I didn't have to say anything, it was just known.

AJ: And if you throw around certain words like “significant other” instead of “boyfriend” or “husband,” or if you say “partner.”

Michelle: It's like a dead giveaway.

Sara: Or “life partner” especially.

In this exchange, Sara, AJ, and Michelle demonstrate different examples of using clothes as language and language to portray identity. When Sara said, “then I didn’t have to say anything, it was just known,” she implies that others at the group mixer who had the insider knowledge would know that she identifies as a member of an LGBTQ population.

Briefly, Justin mentioned, too, using coded language to gauge a situation before coming out. He stated,

If I know you well enough, and we have conversations that may bring up something like a relationship or what you do outside of school then I may say, I may be like, "Oh yeah me and my partner..." or something like that to kind of give, be a buzz word to say ‘he might be gay’ or ‘he's in a different type of relationship.’

By using the word “partner,” Justin and AJ are using a term that would alert others with insider knowledge that they identify with LGBTQ communities. For AJ, Michelle, Sara, and Justin, using symbolic language (“my partner”) or wearing certain clothing or accessories (“some Chaco’s”) indicates to others with insider knowledge that they may identify a certain way, while it may not give away their identity to those who are outsiders. If insider/outsider status is constantly being negotiated (Merriam, Johnson-



Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad 2010), then negotiation for participants becomes context specific, like the process of coming out.

I included this salient point within my analyses, because personally I find it to be particularly powerful. Individuals within LGBTQ communities may choose to use symbolic language instead of outright saying “my girlfriend” or “my boyfriend” in order to gain an understanding of the context around them before coming out.

**4.3.b *Trans-ness and clothing.*** Rachel mentioned her concern over wearing clothes normatively assigned to women to class before she came out due to her worry that she would be violating an unspoken code. She stated, “If you wear different sorts of clothes to class that someone may not expect you to wear you might be considered a disruption and then be asked to leave.” I placed this salient point under the theme of “passing privilege” because Rachel addressed the potential consequences for transgressing binary gender identity and expression. Depending on her presentation of gender identity and gender expression, Rachel can either pass or disrupt binary gender norms. Foucault (1975) argued that relations of force in prisons as well as in hospitals and schools produce effects of surveillance on the body—in turn generating self-surveillance. In practicing discernment about clothing choices, Rachel self-surveils her performance of gender. In this case, that means in many on-campus contexts she erases her transgender identity.

Researchers at GLSEN (2013) found that trans students sometimes reported being disciplined for wearing clothing that did not match their biological sex. I have not found research concerning the same issue in higher education. I was curious to see if college students had been disciplined due to their dress. On the survey, I asked if respondents had

been “Disciplined because of or prevented from wearing clothes of another gender.” Interestingly, Emily Greytak, the Research Director at GLSEN, was surprised that I was asking about this experience on the climate survey. She wondered if the question was relevant in higher education spaces. Ultimately, no survey respondents indicated that they had been disciplined because of or prevented from wearing clothes of another gender (Please see Chapter 5).

**4.3.1 Survey additions.** My understanding of passing privilege as described by the focus group participants influenced the creating of the following survey items (See Figure 4.5).

#### **4.4 Theme 3: Affirmation**

Eight participants (AJ, Michelle, Sara, Rachel, Paloma, Dense, Justin, and Alex) discussed their feelings concerning affirmation. AJ shared that she believes that “everyone is pretty positive [on campus].” Michelle stated that she felt “very comfortable for [herself].” Paloma and Justin agreed that campus is “comfortable” and that they feel “welcomed.”

I coded two categories related to affirmation: (a) self-affirmation (substantive enough to not need on campus activities), and (b) connections between campus resources and activities, and affirmation (participants who cited campus resources and activities that affirmed their identities). I developed this theme from focus group responses to the prompt, “Tell me about spaces on campus where you feel celebrated and nurtured/” Participants with self-affirming practices rejected the question.

1.) Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to avoid discrimination?
--

Yes  
No

2.) Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to protect your personal safety?  
Yes  
No

3.) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I make an effort to pass as straight in my classes.				
I make an effort to pass as straight in my residence hall.				
I make an effort to pass as straight at campus events.				

4.) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity in classes.				
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity in my residence hall.				
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity at campus events.				

Figure 4.5 – Questions added to the survey concerning passing privilege.

**4.4.a: Self-Affirmation.** Three participants discussed feeling as though they did not need external affirmation in order to feel comfortable with their identities. When asked about feeling “celebrated and nurtured,” Michelle responded, “I don't know if I'd use those words...I guess that's not something I necessarily look for, because I feel very comfortable [in being] myself so I don't feel like I need to be in a 100% constantly supportive environment.” AJ replied to Michelle, stating, “I agree with that totally.”

AJ and Michelle both shared only positive experiences on campus. One might argue that an absence of discrimination on campus might decrease the need for affirmative activities. Michelle shared that she did not feel as though she needed to be “celebrated for being gay... [Constant celebration would] become obnoxious.” AJ communicated that she felt that “‘comfortable’ would be a better word” than “celebrated” or “nurtured” when asking about spaces that affirm LGBTQ identities. Paloma described feeling “encouraged” and “supported” whenever she came out to someone on campus. She said, “I feel like I’ve been very encouraged and supported whenever I have come out to anybody.”

**4.4.b: Affirmation from campus resources.** In contrast to those who felt as though self-affirmation was substantive enough, four participants, Sara, Denise, Justin, and Alex, responded with examples of the ways they felt “celebrated” or “nurtured”. Though she did not like the words “celebrated” and “nurtured,” Sara shared,

I guess on-campus organizations are where I feel most welcome and nurtured and where I like to work on campus. So honestly, like outside of the classroom for me... Faculty is nurturing, too, I just don't have much interaction time with them. Sara feels most welcomed and nurtured in student organizations. This makes sense, because Sara shared how much she felt “loved” by members of the Feminist Union at SRU.

Denise and Alex discussed feeling celebrated after SRU Monthly, the student-led magazine on campus, published an article about being trans and SRU. Alex said, “That article definitely did make me feel supported, but also the response we got to it. [Also] not having anyone write shit on the online article, which there is still no negative

comment.” Denise shared, “When I saw that... SRU Monthly did the trans student issue I was pretty excited.” Denise shared, too, that she had positive experiences attending the annual “gay picnic” hosted by the LGBTSRO. Although Rachel and Paloma denied their need for nurturing and celebratory activities on campus, they, too, referenced the picnic and their own positive experiences. I discuss this event further in my examination of on-campus events, in section 4.5.e

Justin shared that he felt supported as an undergraduate when he belonged to the LGBTSU, but shared that he “wishes that there was a graduate student version” of the organization.

School personnel who contribute to a positive school environment for LGBTQ students can contribute to a student’s overall sense of belonging and wellbeing (GLSEN, 2012; Pace, 2004; Payne & Smith, 2010; Quasha, et. al, 2014). Some participants felt as though self-affirmation was enough, while others discussed specific external affirmations that were effective in making them feel celebrated and nurtured. I would like to examine reactions to the words “nurtured”, “celebrated”, “affirmed”, and “comfortable” in the future.

**4.4.1 Survey additions.** I decided to keep the language of “celebrated and nurtured” in the survey, as the reactions during the focus groups were mixed. I decided to add a text box in which respondents could add details to their answers. The language also was approved by the director of the LGBTSRO.

#### **4.5 Construct: Campus Climate**

Many aspects of campus life contribute to campus climate. Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger, & Hope (2013) defined campus climate as the cumulative attitudes and

behaviors of students that concern access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs.

1.) Are there areas on campus (departments, student organizations, etc.) where you feel as though you are celebrated and/or nurtured as an LGBTQ person? Yes No  If yes, please describe. [Large text box]
---

*Figure 4.6 – Questions concerning feeling celebrated and nurtured.*

In this section, I will explore campus climate through one subtheme and five salient points. Each of the nine participants discussed different aspects of campus life that relate to campus climate. I represent one subtheme, (a) Greek Life, and five salient points about navigating campus climate. The salient points are (a) navigating classroom dynamics, (b) student organizations, (c) safety and discomfort, (d) on campus events, and (e) gender-neutral bathrooms.

**4.5.a Greek Life.** Seven participants (Michelle, AJ, Justin, Rachel, Alex, and Denise) discussed Greek Life, which I coded and analyzed as a subtheme. Denise shared that she does not know if she would feel safe if she “actually went to fraternity parties.” Alex described their experiences with “frat parties”:

I can speak on the frat parties, because I go to the music frat party, and I go to them in Drag, so that's always, like, straight people just don't know what to do.

But generally, it's fine, I mean. But that is the music school also; it tends to be a little bit more progressive of [the Greek Life organizations].

Though Alex did not explicitly acknowledge that there is a difference, it is important to distinguish between social organizations that use Greek letters and chartered members of

the North American Interfraternity Council (IFC). Alex did share their experiences with rushing IFC fraternities and having bids removed once they came out as queer. They shared,

I actually rushed [IFC fraternities] my freshman and sophomore years, and I got bids, and then [had] those bids removed when they found out I was queer. They retracted the bid when they found out I was queer. They didn't say that was why, but the next day after [I came out] I got three letters saying the bids were no longer [being offered].

Alex later shared that they believe that the Office of Greek Life at SRU is “trying to work on [their homophobia],” but stated that they had not personally seen results of their efforts.

AJ and Michelle discussed how much of Greek Life reproduces conformity. AJ said,

I think the Greek life here – and I don't have any experience in Greek life... [I] think about all the girls wear the same thing, all the boys wear the same exact thing. There is no diversity in that, and I could imagine that coming out or even [broaching] the subject of coming out would be incredibly scary... You would have a huge amount of push back, I would imagine – especially from frat boys.

Michelle added,

Like [AJ] said, there's not much diversity, and I think there's a big stake put into Greek life in conformity – especially here [at SRU]... there isn't a whole lot of visible diversity, but I do think that there probably is a decent percentage of LGBT students involved in Greek life, but [they] don't feel like they can be open

about [their sexuality], which really stunts their own personal growth...I think they're there, but they're not going to talk about it, because some places will kick you out [or the fraternity or sorority]. That's an ethical issue, but that easily happens.

Michelle felt that having individuals come out within the sorority setting would allow more opportunity for others to come out and break some conformity. She said, "I think if one person would [come out] and get it over with... there would be more people coming out."

As a former member and president of a sorority at another university, Michelle shared that she gets asked a lot of questions about her sexuality in relation to her role as a sorority member:

I think I get more questions [about my sexual orientation], because I was also president of my sorority, so that's not very typical I would say. So I get more questions like, 'How does that work?' and 'How did you survive Greek Life being a lesbian who was out?'

Individuals who ask these questions may assume that being a lesbian in a leadership position within a sorority is an impossible combination given the heteronormative demands of participating in single-sex social organizations. Such assumptions reflect additional expectations regarding conformity in Greek Life.

Finally, Justin shared that he chose not to join a fraternity, though he had wanted to join one. He said,

[I felt like I would be] criticized, and maybe mocked or picked on, so I probably prevented myself from having some bad experiences [by not rushing]. I thought



about joining a fraternity before... [But] because of my sexuality, I decided not to... [I also decided not to join because of] the Black community in general, but Black men especially – I feel like they're really on you about being very masculine...I wanted to have a brotherhood...I decided not to, because I am a homosexual man, and I didn't want to get subjected to whatever I may be subjected to.

Justin felt that because Black men expected “very masculine” behavior that he might be targeted due to his intersecting identities as a Black, gay man. Wanting brotherhood was not worth the risk.

In Chapter 2, I discussed Welter’s (2012) study, in which the researcher found that participants shared many positive stories from their Greek Life experiences but also had an overall negative feeling about Greek Life. Michelle shared her own positive experiences with Greek Life, and also shared a negative perspective of Greek Life. Alex shared their own negative experiences rushing fraternities and AJ and Justin discussed the particular demands of conformity.

I did not add new questions to the survey based off of this subtheme, but I did include aspects of Greek Life in other survey questions. These questions may be seen in prompts in Question 2 about Campus Climate, found in Figure 4.7.

2.) Do you avoid any of the following places on campus because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable? (Check all that apply.)

Bathrooms

Athletic Centers (The Strom, Blatt)

The Russell House

The Horseshoe

Fraternity Houses

Sorority Houses

Classroom Buildings

Residence Halls

Dining Halls

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2.) Which of the following have you experienced at SRU?

(Please check all that apply)

Disciplined for identifying as LGBT

Prevented from using preferred name

Prevented from using preferred gender pronouns

Required to use the bathroom that you did not identify with

Prevented from joining an athletic team due to identifying as LGBT

Prevented from joining a student organization due to identifying as LGBT

Prevented from joining a sorority or fraternity due to identifying as LGBT

Disciplined because of or prevented from wearing clothes of another gender

Prevented from discussing or writing about LGBT topics in classroom assignments

3.) Which best describes your living situation?

On-campus residence hall

Fraternity or Sorority house

Off-campus home or apartment

Off-campus home or apartment with parents

*Figure 4.7 – Additions to questions related to Greek Life. (Note: These questions are in different subsections of the survey, which is why the numbers do not flow in one cohesive unit in this figure.)*

**4.5.b Navigating classroom dynamics.** Five participants (AJ, Rachel, Paloma, Justin, and Michelle) shared their experiences with classroom dynamics. AJ posited that

positive classroom experiences could foster an environment in which individuals do better academically. She said,

I mean obviously I feel more comfortable in my environment, so I'm going to perform better academically and be more apt to share things in my graduate classes as well as with my students. I mean, I think if you're comfortable you're going to perform better, you're going to be happier.

Vice versa, Rachel shared that a negative classroom experience can cause a student to be unsuccessful; “If a professor was mean to me, I was almost guaranteed to fail that class... I would get so stressed because [of] the professor just having that [unsupportive attitude].”

Paloma shared an experience in which the professor and students contributed to her discomfort. Describing a class where her peers were “very bigoted and they were very, very, open about their opinions about how they felt”, she explained,

[The students] were just really combative and there were many times I felt like I was the only person who [was tolerant of LGBTQ issues], and the professor pretty much refused to rein the class in for the sake of discussion, but it didn't really come off as discussion, because then it ended up feeling more threatening... I had approached the professor about it numerous times, and I said, “This makes me feel very uncomfortable. I wish you would rein them in when they start to get [offensive]”... [The professor] would not do anything even after I had requested [intervention] multiple times.

For Rachel, who identifies as a trans woman, the use of correct gender pronouns in the classroom is important. She shared one experience in which her professor misgendered her during class.

My face turned beat red [when the professor misgendered me]... I didn't know how to react to this. I was like, "Are people [going to] start questioning my gender?" "Are they going to start calling me male?"... I was really stressed out about that the entire day today, until I asked my professor a question, and then [another student] gendered me as female, so I was like, "Okay, maybe I'm freaking out over nothing."

The anxiety Rachel described when her professor misgendered her was mollified somewhat when a peer used her correct gender pronoun.

Though I did not achieve saturation with this salient point, and therefore, it is not a theme, I included it due to its connection to the literature. Community college students in Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin's (2015) quantitative study indicated that the classroom is the most important space in determining campus climate perceptions. Researchers at GLSEN (2013) reported the importance of a welcoming classroom in LGBTQ student success, too.

This salient point influenced the creation of the survey question: "Do you feel as though your grades have suffered due to hardships experienced because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?" Also, I decided to include the option "In classrooms on campus" when asking respondents where they have personally experienced verbal harassment. These questions may be seen in Figure 4.8.

3.) I have personally experienced verbal harassment...

Please check all that apply.

In classrooms on campus.

In my residence hall.

At athletic events.

At non-athletic events on campus.

Walking around campus.

I have not personally experienced verbal harassment.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3.) Do you feel as though your grades have suffered due to hardships experienced because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?

Yes

No

I don't know

*Figure 4.8* – Questions added to the survey related to this classroom dynamics.

*Note:* These questions are in different subsections of the survey, which is why their numbers do not flow in one unit.

**4.5.c Student organizations.** Five participants (Sara, Rachel, Justin, Denise, and Alex) discussed how having supportive student organizations can contribute to a positive campus climate. Sara stated, “I guess [on] campus organizations are where I feel most welcome and nurtured...I’m the president for the Feminist Union – that’s welcoming and nurturing, because they love me.” For Sara, feeling loved by her organization’s members allows her to feel welcomed and nurtured.

Rachel shared, “As a member of the progressive clubs, my circles are very much influenced with a more queer kind of accepting sort of group, and I feel like this creates a bubble.” This “bubble” may create a sense of safety and belonging for students who find accepting groups on campus. Such groups may have a shared sense of commitment to improving the campus climate for LGBTQ populations as well.

In contrast, Justin lamented the absence of a LBGT SU specifically for graduate students. He said,

Having an organization like [the LBGT SU] that a gay graduate student could go to, to be with more graduate students instead of being with undergrads...I think that would be beneficial, because you can talk about some of the issues you face as a TA or as just a grad student on campus.

Justin's quote reflects the multiple roles graduate students balance when they are teaching assistants ("TA"), and LGBTQ-identified individuals. AJ discussed these tensions in the 'Self-silencing in classrooms' point above. Having resources and organizations that are specifically targeted toward LGBTQ graduate students would be beneficial for SRU's campus climate, as student organizations can be supportive safe havens for LGBTQ students.

Reflecting on the general positive influence of student organizations, Denise disclosed specifically that she "wouldn't necessarily go to like one of the Christian groups on campus." Alex, a member of the same focus group, shared with her that there was Christian group on campus that was accepting of LGBTQ students. Alex discussed, too, negative experiences they had gone through with other Christian groups. They shared that the LBGT SU,

Had a Christian try to take our LBGT SU space – like our meeting room... Like the got the Student Union to double book the room, and [the Christian group] showed up, and we were like, "no we meet here every week. We have for years!" And they were like, "No, we have this reserved and we're going to sit here." And we're like "But there's a room upstairs you can use" and they were like, "No, we

have this reserved.” So the LBGT SU went upstairs, and then we, like, in a fury called the OMSA office and got them removed from there. The guy leading it wasn't even a [student] of SRU. He was like some guy the Christian group brought in. So that was perceived as really homophobic – them trying to just remove us from our space.

Alex shared that this Christian group had persuaded the student union to reschedule the LBGT SU in another room without the organization's consent. This happened regardless of the fact that the LBGT SU had been using this space every week for many years. It took the intervention of the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs to get the space back. The actions of the individuals within the student union do not indicate a positive campus climate. Alex's story is one that captures overt anti-LGBT discrimination on SRU's campus. Additionally, as a matter of policy, the Student Union should not be changing meeting spaces without notifying organizations. I included this salient point in my analyses because what the participants shared echoes Quasha, McCabe, College, and Ortiz (2014) and GLSEN's (2012) findings that student organizations provide supportive spaces for students who identify as LGBT.

**4.5.d Safety and discomfort.** Justin, Michelle, Denise, and AJ shared that they felt safe on campus. Justin said, “I don't feel like I'm unsafe.” Denise commented, “Overall, I feel pretty safe.” When asked if there was anywhere on campus that they felt unsafe or uncomfortable, Michelle and AJ simply said “no.”

In contrast, Rachel and Scott discussed negative experiences in SRU's residence halls. Rachel shared an instance in which people who lived in her residence hall followed her around campus. She explained:

I actually got harassed and yelled at when I actually went to my dorm... I just came back... wearing a skirt from a party and I remember I was shaking, because they were yelling from their car and telling, like, all these horrible things. [They were] calling me a bunch of slurs, and [saying that] they were going to essentially hurt or kill me, or something...I was just so terrified. Then my suite mate was there...[and they] told me I looked pretty, and opened the door for me, because I couldn't open the door. I was crying, and really sad and they opened the door for me.

Rachel shared that she wished that all Resident Mentors (RMs) would undergo Safe Zone training<sup>24</sup>. Scott, a white male undergraduate studying Earth Science, shared that he experienced verbal harassment in his residence hall at times. He said often the RMs stopped the harassment. “In the dorms, I would have people call me ‘faggot’ occasionally, but like it got shut down pretty quickly [by my RMs].”

As a former RM, Justin shared that Safe Zone training was part of the RM’s overall training. He explained that although he felt residence halls were a “safe environment” he was not “out” to his residents. He shared, “I was an RM when I was an undergrad, and we talked about LGBT issues in training... So I felt like it was a safe environment for me to be an LGBT person even though I wasn't necessarily out to my residents.” This appears to be a point of tension in Justin’s disclosure. Though he felt that the residence halls were “a safe environment” for himself as an LGBT person, he decided not to come out to his residents. When asked about this during the member checking process, he clarified that,

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<sup>24</sup> Safe Zone training is a voluntary free service provided by the LGBTSRO that educates faculty, staff, and students across campus about LGBTQ populations.



I didn't count not feeling comfortable coming out as being the same as a state of not being or feeling unsafe. To me it was more about a comfort type thing. I never felt that I would be harmed or abused for coming out, just didn't feel comfortable. In his clarification, Justin emphasized the difference between “comfort” and “safety.” I plan to pursue this distinction in future research.

Evans, Reason, and Broido (2001) documented residence halls as particularly dangerous places on campus through their interview study. They found that having a negative residence hall environment could lead to emotional and mental health issues, internal and external negativity, and feelings of being unsafe. Evans et. al also found that students who felt as though their RMs were homophobic reported higher levels of dissatisfaction within their lives. The researchers argued that having residence life staff complete a Safe Zone training course as part of training could be beneficial towards creating a more welcoming space for LGBT residents. Justin shared that his RM training included a Safe Zone course, which made him feel safer as a gay RM. It is also possible that Scott's RM completed Safe Zone training, as he has addressed issues of hate speech within the residence hall.

In reflecting on the presentation of a gay sexual orientation on campus, Scott made the distinction between safety and comfort. He stated, “There are a lot of places I wouldn't walk around holding hands with a guy, but... I don't know if I would be really endangered or anything. It would be more like discomfort.” Also describing holding hands with men, Alex shared that they do not typically hold hands on campus with men, because they fear for their partner's safety. “I fear for their safety,” they explained. “I'm huge – I'm 6'2”, 230 pounds, I'm not afraid of most things but like I mean, [my boyfriend

is] like a hundred fifty pounds, poor thing. So, I feared for the guys I date mostly not my own safety.” I find it interesting that the distinction is made once again here between safety and comfort, as I included both in the question during the focus group. In order to parse out the difference, I added a question to the survey concerning feelings of discomfort on campus (see Figure 4.5).

AJ shared feeling unsafe due to her gender as female. She explained, “I don't feel unsafe anywhere. I feel more unsafe as just a woman than unsafe as a gay woman. Like if I'm walking to my car, I do have a taser. I might have it out.” I feel that this is an important distinction to note that the university could use in order to assist female students in feeling safer on campus. Because of this, I added the option of “sex” to reasons why respondents may feel unsafe on campus to the survey (see Figure 4.5).

I share this salient point due to its connection to Rankin's (2005) work on climate surveys and GLSEN's six climate domains. As discussed in Chapter 2, Rankin (2005) found that about 20% of LGBTQ university students reported feeling unsafe in her climate survey. Researchers from GLSEN (2013) found that more than half of secondary LGBTQ students (55.5%) reported feeling unsafe at school due to their sexual orientation. Further, 38.7% of students felt unsafe because of their gender expression.

The following survey additions were made because of the data from participants, Rankin (2005) and GLSEN (2013) (Please see Figure 4.9).

**4.5.e On campus events.** Rachel, Paloma, and Denise spoke about on campus events having a positive effect on their campus experiences. Rachel shared that she attended a “gay picnic,” during one of her first days on campus. An annual event held by the LBGT SRO the picnic is well known on campus. Rachel attended the picnic at the

beginning of her freshman year. This was an important experience for her, as it was where she first came out. She shared,

There's a gay picnic... I went here, [and] I wasn't really out at all. I sat down in this little corner with people, and I kind of started up a conversations...I didn't know anything [about SRU]. That was kind of my first kind of coming out experience, and I think it was the first [people] I came out to, but I didn't really know at the time how it was going to go.

This event provided Rachel with an accepting and affirmative space on campus.

1.) Do you feel unsafe on campus because of your perceived or actual... (Please check all that apply) Sex Gender Identity Race or Ethnicity Sexual Orientation
2.) Are there areas on campus (departments, student organizations, etc.) where you would feel uncomfortable as an LGBTQ person OR you perceive that LGBTQ people are not welcomed? Yes No  If yes, please describe. [Large text box]

*Figure 4.9 – Questions added to the survey concerning safety and comfort.*

Paloma provided affirmative reactions (“mmhmm! The gay picnic!”) as Rachel discussed her experience. She discussed then other on campus events;

I came to school...it seemed like it was, like you had your LGBTQ groups on campus, and we have The Birdcage and the drag show, whatever. You have these little pockets of gay culture you see on campus, but it wasn't necessarily

something that was discussed in a classroom setting unless it was [in classes in] Women and Gender studies or Social Work or something like that.

Paloma discussed the difference between affirmative classroom spaces and organizational spaces. She stated that she did not feel as though LGBTQ identities were “discussed in a classroom setting,” though she had experienced support elsewhere on campus.

Denise discussed the picnic, too. She described the event as being one that makes her feel impressed with the SRU campus community. She said,

So coming here [to SRU] and seeing one that you had an LGBT coordinator, you had safe space training and you had the gay picnic and an event every single month that you don't have to fight for funding for... was remarkable to me.

Denise felt positively about the university providing an affirmative space at the beginning of the school year, and then repeating affirmative events.

I included this salient point in my analysis due to its alignment to the literature. In Chapter 2, I discussed Renn's (2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005) findings that identity-based spaces on campus might assist LGBTQ student populations in gender identity development and disclosure of their identity. Rachel, Paloma, and Denise each shared positive experiences within affirming spaces on campus.

**4.5.f Gender-neutral bathrooms.** Two participants (Rachel and Michelle) discussed the lack of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus. Rachel shared her experience with the lack of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus and the distance of the one that exists from academic classrooms:

I once had a professor tell me "You're not allowed to use the restroom in this building!" I was like, "What? Okay, well, I'll just use the restroom that's all the

way back at my dorm several feet away just so you're comfortable."...He went on this whole spiel of how this person got fired, because they told a trans person that they weren't allowed to use the locker rooms or something. He was like, "I actually agree with the person who made this decision, and I feel the same way, and I just hope you know that." And I was like, "So, essentially what you're telling me is that you're willing to get fired just so I have to maybe possibly get kidney disease. Okay." It was really awkward.

This display of power from the professor in Rachel's story demonstrates a feasible example of transphobia, as the professor dismisses Rachel's needs and discriminates against her. Rachel later shared that she "did not feel as though anyone would care" if she reported the professor's behavior.

Michelle shared that she was working on a project with the LBGT SRO to map out all of the gender-neutral and single stall bathrooms on campus. "Currently this summer we're bathroom mapping the campus with my internship. So we haven't [gotten] started yet, but I know there's a trans student who is probably going to be working with me to map the entire campus." She explained that in student affairs the use of designated single-sex bathrooms were ignored typically, but that in practice only one bathroom was designated gender neutral.

This salient point is important to include in analysis because having safe spaces for transgender students can contribute significantly to a more positive campus environment (GLSEN, 2013). Seelman (2014) found that trans individuals were often denied access to appropriate restroom facilities. SRU currently has one gender-neutral bathroom, which is not conveniently placed on campus, as it is near a student recreation

center and away from most classroom buildings on campus. In order to assess this point on the survey, I asked whether or not respondents had been “required to use the bathroom that [they] did not identify with.” This question may be seen in Figure 4.3 earlier in this chapter.

#### **4.6 The South**

Three participants, Michelle, Sara, and AJ, discussed the South as a unique cultural space. Michelle shared that it can be difficult to know how people feel about you, as “there’s not enough hate direct speech” between individuals. Instead, people often speak negatively of people “behind your back.” She related this to “southern hospitality,” explaining that she feels that southern hospitality is best described by the statement, “We’re not going to say it to your face, but we’ll talk about you behind your back.” She explained, “I have found that [attitude] a lot, even for the Northerners that come down here - they learn pretty quick, they catch on.” She elaborated,

People always told me when I was growing up, ‘You know [there is] southern hospitality, and everyone’s so nice.’ It’s like, no they’re not nicer than anybody else, they just say [nice things] to your face and go around and talk about you behind your back.

While Michelle was sharing these sentiments, AJ was fervently nodding and said “Bless your heart,” to which Sara and Michelle laughed and nodded. Sara shared,

Having grown up in the South, I’ve just become so accustomed to the behind-your-back rather than to-your-face thing, so like I don’t really get frightened, because I’m not out to people that I, like, know would be hostile to me, or say

something and if they do then, like, obviously I don't know. I've grown accustomed to not giving a shit about all that stuff.

Sears (1991; Sears & Williams, 1997) documented difficulties for LGB individuals residing in the South. Much of this was due to outright hostility surrounding religious beliefs. Although religious beliefs weren't mentioned as being part of the discrimination experienced by participants, Sears (1991) did mention southern hospitality as very misleading.

I included this salient point because of its relation to the framework for this study. I was surprised that only three participants discussed the South as a cultural space when discussing their experiences. However, it is possible that this occurred because of an oversight by me as the researcher. I did not specifically ask about the South as a cultural space, because I was operating under the assumption that everyone who lives in the South considers the cultural space to be unique. It is possible that other participants consider it this way as well, but I did not ask questions to prompt such beliefs. Though Michelle is from Indiana, it is also possible that the other participants have not been outside of the South, or do not see it as a unique cultural space.

**4.6.1 Survey additions.** I did not create additional questions for the survey based on this data.

## CHAPTER 5:

### SURVEY ANALYSIS

#### 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I represent data from the survey I conducted. Sixty-eight SRU students responded to the web survey. This survey was conducted in order to answer the second part of my research question: “Using GLSEN’s climate study domains, do students who are ‘out’ report different experiences compared to students who are not out? What are those differences?”

As I stated in Chapter 3, the six campus climate domains provided by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2013) informed the survey’s construction. I conducted three focus groups with nine SRU students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer as well. I used the data collected from these focus groups to augment and create additional items for the survey instrument. For more information on how data collected from the focus group affected survey construction, please see Chapter 4.

This chapter is divided as follows; first, I represent respondent demographics, which include an examination of outness, too. Then, I represent findings informed by GLSEN’s six climate domains, and an additional domain on passing privilege. Finally, I provide an examination of responses to open-ended questions.



## 5.2 Respondent Demographics and Outness

Respondent were mostly undergraduate students (n=61) as opposed to graduate students (n=3). The majority of respondents were first year students (n=23), followed by juniors (n=17), seniors (n=15), sophomores (n=6), Ph.D. students (n=2), and M.A. students (n=1). Table 5.1 provides the year in school for all respondents.

Table 5.1

<i>Year in School</i>		
Year in School	n	%
Freshman	23	35.4
Junior	17	26.2
Senior	15	23.1
Sophomore	6	09.2
Graduate Student – Ph.D.	2	03.1
Graduate Student – M.A.	1	01.5

Most respondents lived on campus in a residence hall (n=32). Others lived off campus on their own (n=27), off campus with family (n=5), or on campus in a house associated with Greek Life (n=1). Table 5.2 shows where respondents lived.

Table 5.2

<i>Residence</i>		
Residence Type	n	%
On-campus residence hall	32	49.2
Off-campus home or apartment	27	41.5
Off-campus home or apartment with family	5	07.7
Fraternity or sorority house	1	01.5

*Note.* Three people did not answer this question.

The majority of participants identified as gay (n=21). Bisexual individuals represented over a quarter of respondents (n=19), followed by lesbians (n=11), pansexuals (n=5), queer (n=2), and questioning individuals (n=1). Surprisingly, three

respondents identified as heterosexual<sup>25</sup> and cisgender, and four identified as another orientation. Other orientations were written in, and included “asexual<sup>26</sup>” (n=2), “pretty gay” (n=1), “demisexual<sup>27</sup>” (n=1), and the final did not share her or his sexual orientation. These orientations were written in space provided in the survey. One respondent did not share her, hir, or his sexual orientation. I display these data in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

<i>Sexual Orientation</i>		
Sexual Orientation	n	%
Gay	21	31.8
Bisexual	19	28.8
Lesbian	11	16.7
Pansexual	5	7.6
Other	4	6.1
Heterosexual	3	4.5
Queer	2	3.0
Questioning	1	1.5

The majority of participants identified as cisgender women (n=29), followed by cisgender men (n=21), and gender queer individuals (n=6). One respondent identified as a transgender man. Five participants identified themselves as “other”. Among them two identified as “agender<sup>28</sup>,” one as “demiagender girl,” and two chose not to share her, hir, or his identity label. I represent these data on Table 5.4.

<sup>25</sup> Individuals who identified as heterosexual and cisgender were removed from further analyses.

<sup>26</sup> Scherrer (2015) defined “Asexual” as a sexual identity for individuals who do not experience sexual attraction.

<sup>27</sup> Robertson (2014) defined “Demisexual” as a sexual identity for individuals who do not experience sexual attraction without emotional attachment.

<sup>28</sup> Scherrer (2015) defined “Agender” as a neutral gender identity (neither male nor female).

Table 5.4

<i>Gender Identity</i>		
Gender Identity	n	%
Cisgender Woman	29	48.3
Cisgender Man	21	35.0
Gender Queer	6	10.0
Other	5	05.0
Transgender Man	1	01.7
Transgender Woman	0	00.0

The majority of respondents identified as White (n=53), followed by Black (n=12), Asian or Pacific Islander (n=3), and Latino/a, Chicano/a, or Hispanic (n=3), American Indian or Alaskan Native (n=1), and other (n=1). The respondent who chose “other” did not share how she, sie, or he identified. I represent the race and/or ethnicity of respondents in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>		
Race and/or Ethnicity	n	%
Caucasian or White	53	82.8
African American or Black	12	18.8
Asian or Pacific Islander	3	04.7
Latino/a, Chicano/a, or Hispanic	3	04.7
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1	01.6
Other	1	01.6

In the Demographics section (Please see Appendix G), respondents were asked to rate their outness on a scale from one to six. This question only provided anchor labels on the first and last option - “One” (1) was “not at all out” and “Six” (6) was “completely out.” The means for both of these measures were centered, with outness on campus having a mean of 3.5 and outness at home also having a mean of 3.5. It is interesting to

note that the standard deviation for outness on campus was smaller than that of outness at home, which indicated that participants were grouped more closely toward the center for outness on campus. This means that more respondents report being between a 3 and 4 on the outness scale when on campus, while the outness of respondents at home was distributed across a greater range. These data are represented in Table 5.6 and Figure 5.1.

Table 5.6

*Outness on Campus and at Home*

Outness	n	M	SD
Out on campus	64	3.5	1.5
Out at home	64	3.5	2.1

*Note.* Outness was rated on a scale from 1-6, with 1 being “not at all out” and 6 being “completely out.”

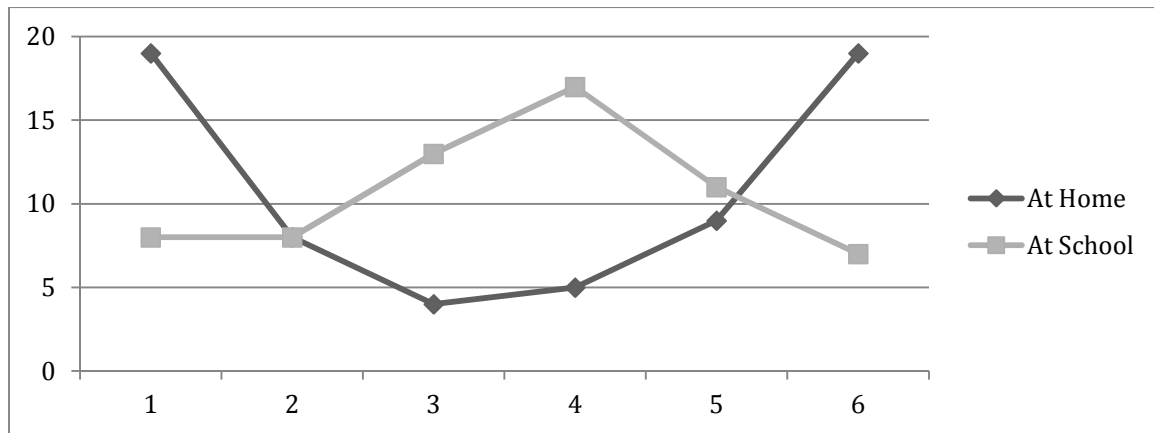


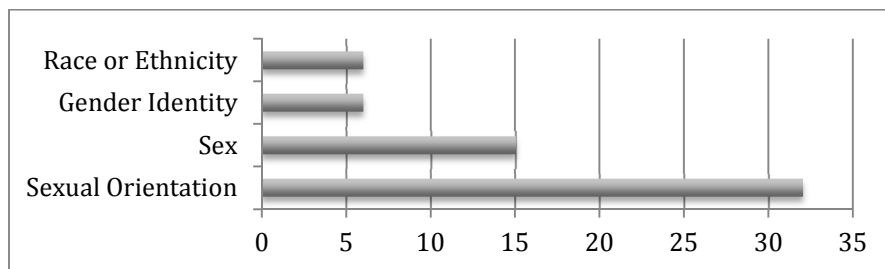
Figure 5.1. Graph demonstrating the frequency of responses for outness at home and outness at school.

Four focus group participants shared that it was easier to be out on campus than it was to be out at home. This pattern is found within the literature, as Rhoads (1994) found that more LGBT students came out at school before coming out at home.

### 5.3 Domain I: School Safety

I asked six questions concerning school safety. In this section, I provide descriptive statistics for those questions and then examine the relationship between outness and safety.

First, respondents were asked if they felt unsafe on campus due to various aspects of their identity. Figure 5.1 demonstrates that respondents reported feeling unsafe due to their sexual orientation (n=32), sex (n=15), race or ethnicity (n=6), gender identity<sup>29</sup> (n=6). Although it appears that few respondents indicated that they feared for their safety due to race or ethnicity, it is worth noting that the overall sample was predominantly White. Sexual orientation was the number one reason why respondents reported feeling unsafe on campus.



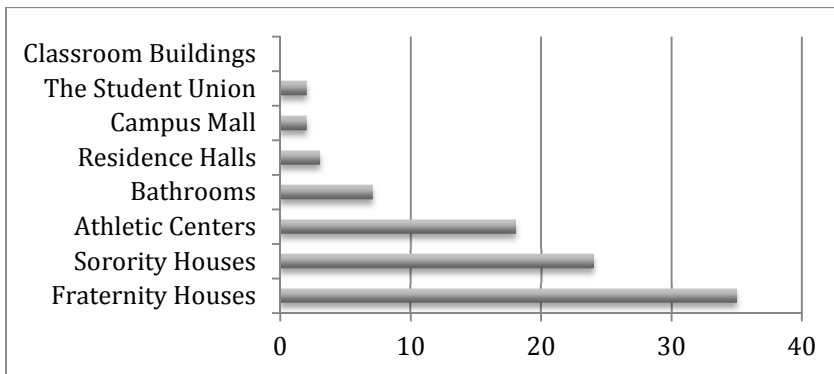
*Figure 5.2.* Bar graph demonstrating the number of respondents who reported feeling unsafe due to aspects of their identity.

Respondents were asked to specify which spaces on campus they felt unsafe. Figure 5.3 demonstrates that respondents reported feeling unsafe in many different spaces on campus, though no respondents indicated that they felt unsafe in classroom buildings. The majority of respondents shared that they felt unsafe in fraternity houses (n=35) and sorority houses (n=24). Respondents reported feeling unsafe in campus athletic centers

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<sup>29</sup> As discussed in Chapters 2 and 4, the term “gender identity” refers to one’s sense of self. Sex refers to one’s biological sex. (Please refer back to Figure 4.3 for the diagram of sex and gender).

(n=18), bathrooms (n=7), residence halls (n=3), in the student union (n=2), and on the campus mall (n=2) as well.



*Figure 5.3.* Bar graph representing the number of respondents who reported feeling unsafe in specific spaces on campus.

GLSEN (2011; 2012; 2013) found that LGBTQ high school students felt most unsafe in locker rooms, bathrooms, and athletic fields. Unsurprisingly, athletic centers and bathrooms ranked as spaces that many survey respondents felt unsafe. Generally, respondents indicated that they did not feel safe within Greek Life organizations. This data echoes much of the data from the focus groups, too, where negative experiences with Greek Life was discussed by many of the participants. Welter (2012) documented LGBTQ identified fraternity and sorority members having positive memories about their time in Greek Life organizations, yet having overall negative feelings about Greek Life.

Within the section of the survey about safety, four Likert-type items followed the statements: I feel safe in campus classrooms. I feel safe in my residence hall. I feel safe participating in and contributing to class. Overall, I consider SRU to be a safe place. These questions were assigned a number from 1 to 4: 1 was “Strongly Disagree” and 4 was “Strongly Agree”. Table 5.7 represents the mean and standard deviations for each question. Means ranged from 3.08 to 3.42, indicating that respondents tended to agree with statements concerning their safety.

Table 5.7

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Type Questions about Safety*

Question	n	M	SD
I feel safe in campus classrooms.	65	3.42	.50
I feel safe in my residence hall.	58	3.33	.54
I feel safe participating in and contributing to class.	65	3.29	.70
Overall, I consider SRU to be a safe place.	65	3.08	.59

After examining descriptive statistics for these items, I created a variable that totaled the scores from each of these four questions. The variable Safety had values ranging from 9-16. The mean was 13.08, and the standard deviation was 1.86.

Cronbach's alpha was .863. I correlated Safety with Outness, which had a correlation coefficient of .179 ( $p = .296$ ). The relationship was not significant. Therefore, I cannot claim a relationship between Safety and Outness. These results are displayed in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8

*Correlations for Safety with Outness*

Variable	M	SD	Alpha	Correlation with Outness	$p$
Safety	13.08	1.86	.863	0.179	.296

Two focus group participants shared negative experiences within their residence halls, which contributed to feeling unsafe. One participant shared positive experiences within his residence hall and as a Resident Mentor. Evans, Reason, and Broido (2001) found that residence halls were spaces that are particularly dangerous for LGBTQ students, and shared that Safe Zone Training could improve residence hall climates.

Safety and comfort in the classroom is of paramount importance, too. Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin (2015) found that that the classroom was the most important space in

determining campus climate perceptions. Researchers at GLSEN (2013) reported the importance of a welcoming classroom in LGBTQ student success. Five focus group participants discussed the importance of classroom dynamics.

#### 5.4 Domain II: Exposure to Biased Language

In order to examine exposure to biased language, I asked respondents to answer questions via 4-point Likert-type scales concerning their experiences hearing derogatory remarks about sexuality and gender. The scale was (1) “Rarely,” (2) “Sometimes,” (3) “Often,” and “Frequently” (4). I represent descriptive statistics about these questions in Tables 5.9 and 5.10. Table 5.9 displays descriptive statistics for how often respondents experienced derogatory remarks from their fellow students on campus. The mean for hearing “That’s so gay” was 2.67. The mean response for “No homo” was 2.41. When asked about other derogatory remarks about sexuality, responses had a mean of 2.45. The mean for derogatory remarks about gender identity was 2.15. Respondents were asked about hearing other remarks as well, which had a mean of 1.75. Though I asked for clarifications for “other” responses, no survey participants indicated what other remarks they have heard around campus.

Table 5.9

##### *Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Type Questions about Biased Language*

How often do you hear the following from other students?	n	M	SD
“That’s so gay”	60	2.67	1.00
Derogatory remarks about sexuality	60	2.45	1.06
“No homo”	59	2.41	1.10
Derogatory remarks about gender identity	59	2.15	1.13
Other remarks	28	1.75	1.27



I then asked about experiences hearing biased remarks from faculty and staff after the questions concerning exposure to biased language from other students. Overall, the means were much lower. The mean for hearing “That’s so gay” from faculty and staff was 1.11. The mean for hearing “No homo” was 1.09. The mean for hearing other derogatory remarks about sexuality (such as “faggot” or “dyke”) was 1.13, and the mean for hearing other derogatory remarks about gender identity (such as “tranny”) was 1.13.

Table 5.10

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Type Questions about Biased Language*

How often do you hear the following from faculty or staff?	n	M	SD
Derogatory remarks about gender identity	56	1.13	0.33
“That’s so gay”	56	1.11	0.37
“No homo”	56	1.09	0.40
Derogatory remarks about sexuality	55	1.07	0.26

Respondents were asked to rate how much they were bothered by hearing anti-LGBT remarks on campus on a scale of 1 (not at all bothered) to 4 (very bothered). Sixty students responded to the question. The mean was 3.32 with a standard deviation of 0.87. This indicates that students were bothered by hearing negative language concerning LGBTQ populations.

After obtaining descriptive statistics for each of the questions within the Biased Language, I created two variables to measure exposure to biased language: one for hearing biased language from other students (BiasedStudents) and one for hearing biased language from faculty and staff (BiasedStaff). These variables were created by totaling the questions from each selection of five questions, presented in Tables 5.4.1 and 5.4.2. The range for BiasedStudents was 5-20, while the range for BiasedStaff was 5-12. The mean for BiasedStudents was 11.12, and the mean for BiasedStaff was 5.62. This

indicates that respondents experience biased language at a higher average rate from students than from faculty and staff. Cronbach's alpha for BiasedStudents was .760, and for BiasedStaff was .627. The correlation coefficient between outness and BiasedStudents was 0.028 ( $p = .860$ ), while the correlation coefficient between outness and BiasedStaff was -0.007 ( $p = .953$ ). Neither result was significant. These results are represented in Table 5.11.

Table 5.11

<i>Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Exposure to Biased Language Totals</i>					
Variable	M	SD	Alpha	Correlation with Outness	<i>p</i>
BiasedStudent	11.12	4.76	.760	0.028	0.86
BiasedStaff	5.62	1.50	.627	-0.007	0.95

Hearing negative and/or biased language around campus contributes to a negative campus climate (e.g. Nadal et al., 2010; Silverschanz, et al., 2008; Woodford et al., 2012; Woodford et al., 2013). In GLSEN's (2013) survey, researchers found that 51.4% of participants reported hearing derogatory or homophobic remarks from faculty and staff. Respondents on GLSEN's survey who reported hearing biased language from school personnel generally had lower campus climate perceptions than those who did not.

### **5.5 Domain III: Experiences of Harassment and Assault at School**

In order to examine experiences of harassment and assault at school, four questions were asked concerning respondent experiences with verbal and physical harassment. These questions were not altered from their original form in GLSEN's (2013) climate study. I decided to keep these questions in their original format, which simply asked respondents to answer with yes (1) or no (0) to each statement. Having a two variable response instead of a Likert-type scale was appropriate, because respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they had experienced harassment.

First, respondents were asked if they have “ever experienced verbal harassment on campus due to [their] perceived or actual sexual orientation.” Almost 20% of respondents indicated that they had experienced verbal harassment (19.7%,  $M=0.23$ ). Fewer students responded that they had experienced verbal harassment due to their perceived or actual gender (13.6%,  $M=0.14$ ). Fortunately, not many students indicated that they had experienced physical violence due to their perceived or known sexual orientation (1.5%,  $M=0.03$ ) or gender (1.5%,  $M=0.00$ ). These data may be found in Table 5.12.

Table 5.12

*Descriptive Statistics for Questions about Experiences of Harassment and Assault*

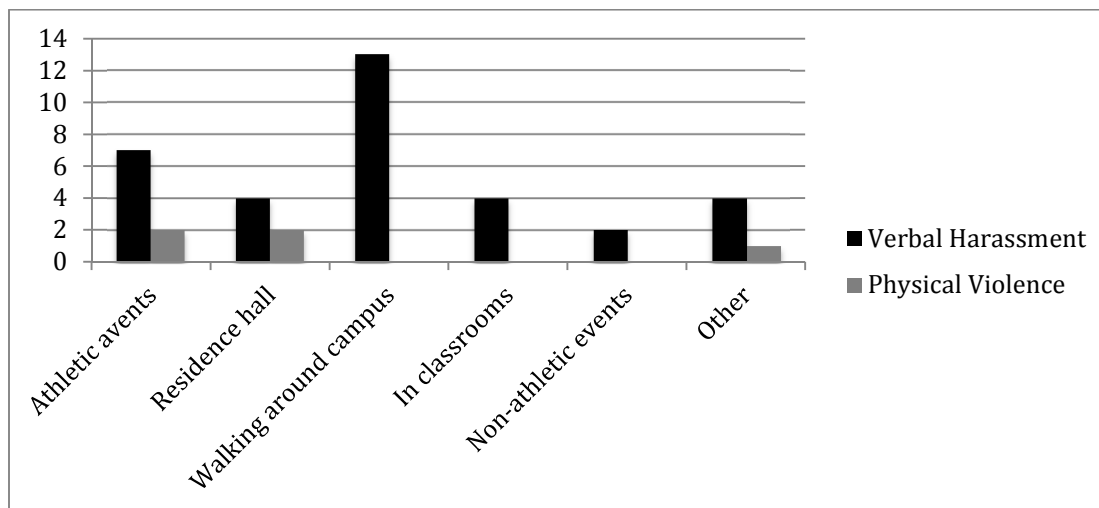
Question	n	% yes	M	SD
Have you ever experienced verbal harassment on campus due to your perceived or actual sexual orientation?	65	19.7	0.23	0.42
Have you ever experienced verbal harassment on campus due to your perceived or actual gender?	65	13.6	0.14	0.35
Have you been threatened with or experienced physical violence on campus due to your perceived or actual sexual orientation?	65	1.5	0.03	0.17
Have you ever been threatened with or experienced physical violence on campus due to your perceived or actual gender?	65	1.5	0.00	0.00

*Note.* The scale ranges from 0 (No) to 1 (Yes).

Respondents were asked to share which spaces where they had experienced verbal harassment or physical violence. A list of locations was provided (walking around campus, at athletic events, in her, hir, or his residence hall, in classrooms on campus, at non-athletic events on campus, and in other places), and students were invited to check all that applied. Some respondents indicated that they had experienced verbal harassment walking around campus ( $n=13$ ). Respondents indicated, too, that they had experienced

verbal harassment at athletic events (n=7), in her, hir, or his residence hall (n=5), in classrooms on campus (n=4), and at non-athletic events on campus (n=2). Four individuals indicated that they had experienced harassment in other places but did not share where those other places were.

Two individuals indicated that they had been threatened with or experienced physical violence due to their sexual orientation (n=1) and gender identity or expression (n=1). Both respondents shared that they had been threatened with or experienced physical violence at athletic events (n=2) and in their residence hall (n=2). One additional respondents chose “other,” but did not specify where else she, sie, or he had experienced physical violence. Data concerning verbal harassment and physical violence are displayed in Figure 5.4.



*Figure 5.4.* Bar graph representing the number of respondents who have experienced verbal harassment and physical violence on campus in specific locations.

After examining descriptive statistics for these items, I created a variable that totaled the scores from each of these four questions. The variable Harassment had values ranging from 0-2. The mean was 0.39, and the standard deviation was 0.63. Cronbach’s alpha was .231. I correlated Harassment with Outness, which had a correlation coefficient

of 0.01. The relationship was not significant ( $p=.916$ ). Therefore, I cannot claim a relationship between Harassment and Outness. These results are displayed in Table 5.13.

Table 5.13

*Correlations for Harassment with Outness*

Variable	M	SD	Alpha	Correlation with Outness	<i>p</i>
Harassment	0.39	0.63	.231	0.01	.97

## 5.6 Domain IV: Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault

In order to measure respondents' experiences with reporting of school-based harassment and assault, I asked questions adapted from GLSEN's (2013) instrument. GLSEN includes questions concerning whether or not respondents believe that their schools are providing a supportive environment for LGBT students, as students are more likely to seek help when they feel supported (GLSEN, 2013). Respondents in this study reported mid-level ranges, approximately a 2.5 mean on a four point Likert-type scale with 1 indicating "strongly disagree," 2 indicating "disagree," 3, indicating "agree," and 4 indicating "strongly agree." The mean for "I feel SRU takes sufficient action to provide a supportive environment for LGBTQ students" was 2.55. The mean for "SRU has visible leadership from the administration regarding issues of sexual orientation" was 2.45. The mean for "SRU thoroughly addresses issues related to sexual orientation" was 2.4. Two questions had lower means: "SRU has visible leadership from the administration regarding issues of gender identity" ( $M = 2.08$ ) and "SRU thoroughly addresses issues related to gender identity" ( $M = 1.99$ ). These data may be seen in Table 5.14.

Table 5.14

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Type Questions about Reporting of School-Based Harassment*

Question	n	M	SD
I feel SRU takes sufficient action to provide a supportive environment for LGBTQ students.	65	2.55	0.88
SRU has visible leadership from the administration regarding issues of sexual orientation.	64	2.45	0.89
SRU thoroughly addresses issues related to sexual orientation.	65	2.40	0.88
SRU has visible leadership from the administration regarding issues of gender identity.	65	2.08	0.92
SRU thoroughly addresses issues related to gender identity.	65	1.99	0.89

In order to examine the relationship between these Reporting and Outness, I created a total score variable which combined each of these five questions. Cronbach's alpha was .926. The scores ranged from 5 to 20, with a mean of 11.55, and a standard deviation of 3.9. Reporting and Outness had a correlation coefficient of -0.06 and was not significant ( $p = .67$ ). Therefore, no conclusions may be drawn from the test. These data can be seen in Table 5.15.

Table 5.15

*Correlations for Reporting with Outness*

Variable	M	SD	Alpha	Correlation with Outness	$p$ .
Reporting	11.55	3.90	.926	-0.06	.67

Respondents were asked two yes or no questions concerning whether or not they believe university policies and procedures adequately meet the needs of LGBTQ individuals on campus. The first question asked specifically about the policies and procedures for gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or questioning individuals. Exactly half of respondents ( $n=33$ ) responded yes, while the other half responded no ( $n=33$ ). The second question was whether or not respondents felt that university policies and procedures

adequately met the needs of transgender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming individuals. Twenty-three respondents (34.3%) indicated that they did feel that university policies and procedures adequately met the needs of transgender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming individuals. Finally, respondents were asked if they knew where to go on campus to find support for LGBTQ issues. Most indicated that they were aware of support for LGBTQ issues (n=43, 64.2%). These data are represented in Table 5.16.

Table 5.16  
*Descriptive Statistics for Yes or No Questions Concerning Policies, Procedures, and Resources*

Statement	n	n “yes”	% yes
Do university policies and procedures adequately meet the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer or questioning people?	65	33	50.0
Do university policies and procedures adequately meet the needs of transgender, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming people?	65	23	34.3
Do you know where to go on campus to find support for LGBTQ issues?	65	43	64.2

## 5.7 Domain V: Experiences of Discrimination at School

In order to examine experiences of discrimination at school, I asked to what extent different identity groups were accepted on campus. Respondents were asked to rate each identity group based on if they were “Not at all accepted” (1), “Sometimes accepted” (2), “Often accepted,” (3), and “Always accepted” (4). This question came from GLSEN’s (2013) construct of discrimination. Respondents indicated that they felt lesbians were the most accepted group on campus ( $M = 2.63$ ), followed by gay individuals ( $M = 2.52$ ), bisexual individuals ( $M = 2.47$ ), questioning individuals ( $M = 2.46$ ), queer individuals ( $M = 2.06$ ), and transgender individuals ( $M = 1.72$ ). These data can be seen on Table 5.17.

Table 5.17

*Descriptive Statistics for Questions about Experiences of Discrimination at School*

To what extent are LGBTQ individuals accepted on campus?	n	M	SD
Lesbian individuals	65	2.63	0.74
Gay individuals	65	2.52	0.66
Bisexual individuals	64	2.47	0.73
Questioning individuals	65	2.46	0.79
Queer individuals	65	2.06	0.66
Transgender individuals	64	1.72	0.58

After examining descriptive statistics for these items, I created a variable that totaled the scores from each group. Alpha for the variable Discrimination was .841. The variable had values ranging from 6 - 24. The mean was 13.83, and the standard deviation was 3.14. I correlated Discrimination with Outness, which had a correlation coefficient of 0.18. The relationship was not significant. Therefore, I cannot claim a relationship between Discrimination and Outness. These results are displayed in Table 5.18.

Table 5.18

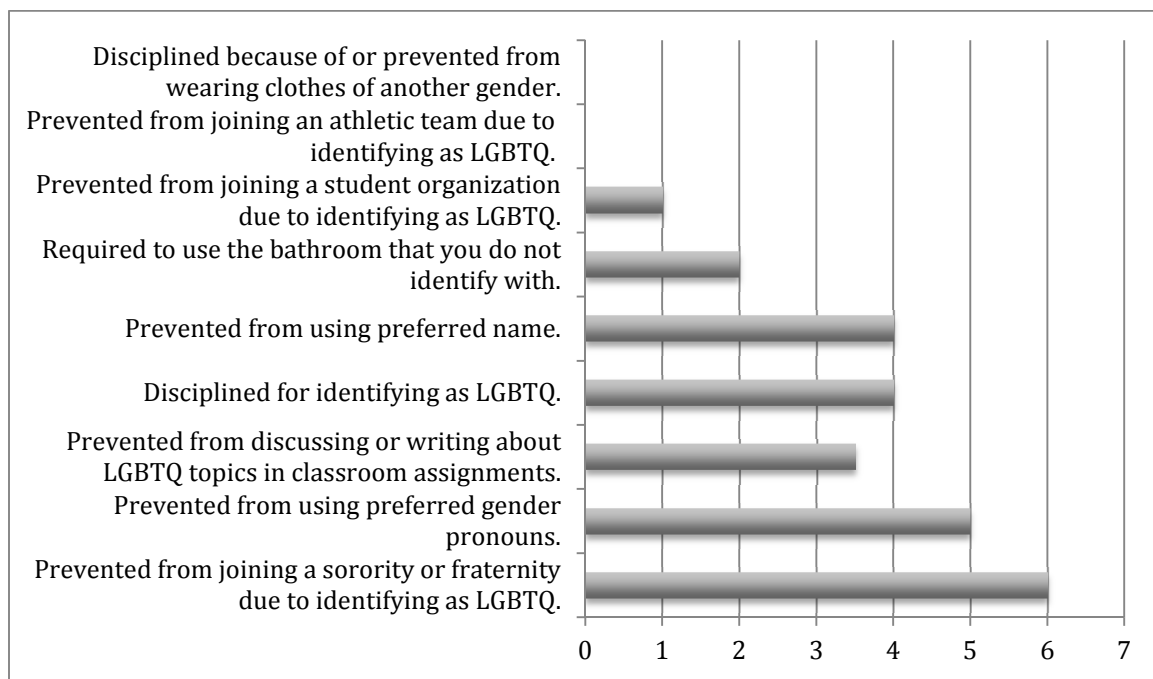
*Correlations for Discrimination with Outness*

Variable	M	SD	Alpha	Correlation with Outness	<i>p</i>
Discrimination	13.83	3.14	.841	0.18	0.17

I asked respondents about their experiences with specific discriminatory actions. This question asked students to indicate which experiences they had encountered during their time at SRU, and requested that they check all that apply. I used GLSEN's (2013) climate study to create this question, which was modified to add instances of discrimination discussed during the focus groups. Six students shared that they were prevented from joining a sorority or fraternity due to identifying as L, G, B,T, and/or Q, five were prevented from using their preferred gender pronouns, and five were prevented



from discussing or writing about LGLBTQ topics for classroom assignments. Four respondents indicated that they were disciplined for identifying as L, G, B,T, and/or Q, while four shared that they have been prevented from using their preferred name. Two respondents reported being required to use a bathroom that they did not identify with, and reported being prevented from joining a student organization due to identifying as LGBTQ. Fortunately, no students reported being disciplined because of prevented from wearing clothes of another gender, or being prevented from joining an athletic team due to identifying as LGBTQ. I have displayed these data in Figure 5.5.



*Figure 5.5.* Bar graph representing the number of respondents who have experienced discriminatory actions at SRU.

Researchers at GLSEN (2013) reported that almost a quarter (23.5%) of LGBTQ participants indicated that their schools had forbidden them from discussing or writing about LGBT topics.

## 5.8 Domain VI: Hostile School Climate and Educational Outcomes

In order to examine hostile school climate and educational outcomes, I asked a series of four yes (1) or no (0) questions. Overall, the majority of respondents did not feel as though their educational outcomes had been affected by their sexual orientation or gender identity (see Table 5.19). One individual shared that she, sie, he dropped a class due to negative treatment from the instructor based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation. Two respondents shared that they dropped a class due to negative treatment by an instructor related to their perceived or actual gender identity. Eleven respondents, less than one-fifth (n=11, 16.7%) shared that they felt as though their grades suffered due to hostile action experienced based on their sexual orientation, and two respondents indicated that they felt as though their grades have suffered due to their gender identity.

Table 5.19

### *Descriptive Statistics for Yes or No Questions Concerning Hostile School Climate and Educational Outcomes*

Statement	n	n “yes”	% yes
Have you ever dropped a class because of negative treatment by the instructor related to your perceived or actual sexual orientation?	65	1	1.5
Have you ever dropped a class because of negative treatment by the instructor related to your perceived or actual gender identity?	65	2	3.0
Do you feel as though your grades have suffered due to hardships experienced because of your gender identity?	65	2	3.1
Do you feel as though your grades have suffered due to hardships experienced because of your sexual orientation?	65	11	16.7

Though I did not find a connection within the literature to students dropping classes due to heterosexist or transphobic treatment from a faculty member, the fact that

even one student reported that she, sie, or he had dropped a class due to a faculty member is deplorable.

### **5.9 Domain VII: Passing Privilege**

Passing privilege was not originally a domain found on GLSEN's (2011; 2012; 2013) climate studies. However, the topic was mentioned in the three focus groups I conducted. Therefore, I added a domain to the survey examining the construct of passing privilege. I created the questions by adapting the information I coded in the focus groups.

First, respondents were asked, "Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to avoid discrimination?" The majority of respondents indicated "yes," (n=54, 81.8%). Respondents were then asked, "Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to protect your personal safety?" Once again, the majority of respondents indicated "yes," (n=36, 54.5%).

Respondents were then provided a series of statements and asked to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each on a four point Likert-type scale. These responses were assigned a number from 1 to 4, with 1 being Strongly Disagree, 2 being Disagree, 3 being Agree, and 4 being Strongly Agree. Respondents were also given an option to respond with "N/A" if the statement did not apply to them. These responses were coded as missing data (Fowler, 2012). The first three statements referred to the respondent's attempts to pass as straight, while the second set of three statements referred to the respondent's attempts to hide her, hir, or his gender identity. I have displayed this information on Table 5.20 for each statement related to passing as straight, and I have

represented data on Table 5.21 for each statement related to an individual concealing her, hir, or his gender identity.

Table 5.20

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Type Questions about Passing – Sexual Orientation*

Question	n	M	SD
I make an effort to pass as straight in my classes.	64	2.77	0.90
I make an effort to pass as straight in my residence hall.	54	2.72	1.08
I make an effort to pass as straight at campus events.	64	2.70	0.90

Overall, respondents generally agreed with these statements concerning their attempts to pass as straight. Personally, I find this distressing, as one should not feel it necessary to conceal aspects of their identity. Mustanski, Garofalo, and Emerson, (2010) found that hiding one’s identity correlated with a lower overall mental health, due to increased suicidality and psychological distress.

Table 5.21

*Descriptive Statistics for Likert-Type Questions about Passing – Gender Identity*

Question	n	M	SD
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity in my classes.	26	2.12	1.14
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity in my residence hall.	23	2.12	1.11
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity at campus events.	26	2.04	1.15

As answer options ranged from “Strongly disagree” (1), “Disagree” (2), “Agree” (3), to “Strongly agree (4), a mean of 2 indicated that respondents generally disagreed with statements concerning efforts to conceal their gender identity.

After examining descriptive statistics for these items, I created two variables that totaled the scores from each statement group. The variable PassSexuality had values ranging from 3 – 12, and an alpha of .938. The mean was 8.14, and the standard deviation

was 2.76. I correlated PassSexuality with Outness, which had a correlation coefficient of -0.57 ( $p < .001$ ). The relationship was significant. These correlations indicate that the more out an individual is, the less she, sie, or he attempts to pass as straight. The variable PassGenderIdentity had values ranging from 3 – 12, and an alpha of .966. The mean was 6.17, and the standard deviation was 3.27. I then correlated PassGenderIdentity with Outness, which had a correlation coefficient of -0.19 ( $p = .39$ ). The correlation coefficient was not significant, which means that I cannot draw conclusions about the relationship between the variables. I have displayed data relating to these two composite variables in Table 5.22.

Table 5.22

*Correlations for Discrimination with Outness*

Variable	M	SD	Alpha	Correlation with Outnes	<i>p</i>
PassSexuality	8.15	2.76	.938	-.57	<.000
PassGenderIdentity	6.17	3.27	.966	-.19	.39

### 5.10 Open-Ended Questions

Respondents were asked 5 open-ended questions at the end of the survey. These questions were designed to generate a more nuanced and complete understanding about SRU's campus climate.

First, respondents were asked, “Are there areas on campus (departments, student organizations, etc.) where you feel as though you are celebrated and/or nurtured as an LGBTQ person?” Twenty-three students responded with “The LGBT Student Union,” and six responded with “the Feminist Union,” a student organization. “The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs” was listed seven times, and one respondent shared that two staff members within the OMSA, an assistant director and a graduate assistant, “are

wonderful.” Two respondents specifically mentioned professors who made them feel celebrated and/or nurtured, and two other respondents indicated that they came from supportive departments, the humanities department and the theatre department. Two respondents also mentioned On Campus Housing as being a “helpful” and “inclusive” office.

Two respondents shared detailed responses to the question, “Are there areas on campus where you feel as though you are celebrated and/or nurtured as an LGBTQ person?” One respondent replied,

In almost every circumstance, my sexual orientation is simply accepted as background and I am celebrated/nurtured for other aspects of my personality. It may be that my personal life is pretty thoroughly separate from my classes and work in campus organizations. LGBTSU events and meetings are one exception. The respondent indicated that his sexual orientation is “simply accepted as background.” In Chapters 3 and 4, I discussed how identity-affirming spaces contribute to a positive campus climate. However, this respondent posited that he feels celebrated and nurtured for other aspects of his personality, instead of for his sexual orientation. This statement is similar to perceptions shared by four focus group participants who felt as though their internal self-affirmation was enough.

Another respondent shared, “I don't really talk about being gay with classmates, just like they don't talk to me about their sex lives. I am not secret about it, I just don't flaunt it.” This statement also demonstrates sexual orientation not being at the forefront of each respondent's identity.

The second open-ended question asked on the survey was, “Are there areas on campus (departments, student organizations, etc.) where you would feel uncomfortable as an LGBTQ person or you perceive that LGBTQ people are not welcome?” Within the responses, 19 individuals cited Greek Life organizations and/or events as places they would not feel welcomed (12 stated “fraternities” or “fraternity parties,” 9 mentioned “sororities” or “sorority events,” and 8 mentioned “Greek Life” or “Greek Organizations”). One respondent in particular stated “Fraternity and Sorority Life. Some of these organizations have rules against being LGBT.” Another shared, “I’m in a sorority and scared to come out because I don’t want to be kicked out due to being gay.” The topic of Greek Life has been particularly present within my study, and was discussed by every focus group participant. Further, Welter’s (2012) study has been discussed in Chapters 3, and 4, as well as earlier in this chapter. Welter found that LGBTQ-identified fraternity and sorority members shared an overall negative perspective of Greek Life organizations.

Eight respondents stated that sporting events were places in which they did not feel welcomed; three specifically listed “Athletic events,” five responded with “sporting events,” and one stated, “sports areas.” One respondent after listing “sporting events,” stated,

I usually try to act "straight" at football games and other sporting events due to the large amount of straight guys. Some of the men on this campus are scary for me as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. You never know how someone may react to realizing your sexuality.

Three respondents shared that they feel uncomfortable at athletic centers on campus, with one stating that he feels uncomfortable specifically in “the men’s locker room.” Again, I

drew a connection to GLSEN's (2011; 2012; 2013) studies. Researchers at GLSEN found that LGBTQ youth feel most unsafe in bathrooms, locker rooms, and at athletic events.

Five respondents shared that they felt uncomfortable at Christian organizations or meetings, with two of these respondents stating that these events are "hostile toward LGBTQ [individuals]." This is not surprising, as LGBTQ populations in the South have often been the targets of the Christian religious right (Barton, 2011). In the focus groups, Alex mentioned struggling, too, with the Christian group on campus when they tried to take the LGBTSU's meeting space.

Two respondents shared that professors made them uncomfortable, while two others shared that they felt uncomfortable or unwelcomed in class. One respondent from the College of Education shared that he felt uncomfortable because, "It is still legal in this state for me to be fired for being LGBT as a teacher," though he did not share why exactly this made him feel uncomfortable specifically within the College of Education at SRU. Another respondent stated that he "[Felt uncomfortable in] multiple engineering/computing clubs (this is a combination of fear of sexism & fear of homophobia)."

One individual shared that she, sie, or he felt unsafe "Anywhere with a high density of white heterosexual males." Sadly, another respondent shared, "pretty much everywhere." Another stated,

I would not feel comfortable in most situations if people knew of my gender identity, because individuals who wished to berate me or assault me could find me under any circumstances. I do not feel comfortable expressing my sexuality in almost any public space. I especially do not feel welcome within the Greek



Village or at meetings with Republican/Christian groups on campus because I feel that they are not supportive and may even be hostile to LGBTQ+ students.

This response matches general trends within the data reported earlier in this chapter. For example, data from Table 5.17 reflects that respondents felt that Transgender individuals are “not at all accepted” on campus. Data from Table 5.14 represents that respondents generally disagreed with the statements “SRU has visible leadership from the administration regarding issues of gender identity” (M=2.08) and “SRU thoroughly addresses issues related to gender identity” (M=1.99).

For the third question, respondents were asked, “How do you think LGBTQ populations are perceived on campus?” All 47 respondents who answered this question shared that they believe LGBTQ populations are perceived negatively. Six respondents described feeling as though LGBTQ populations are stereotyped (“all lesbians are butch, all gay men are flamboyant, etc.”). Five respondents shared that LGBTQ populations are perceived as a combination of one or more terms such as “weird,” “freaks,” or “imaginary.” Four people responded that LGBTQ students are ignored, or that “they are not [perceived].” One respondent shared, “Not well. Some people are actively rude and a very small number of people are accepting, but otherwise I feel like lots of people really hate the idea of gay and trans people existing.” Another stated, “[LGBTQ populations] are not welcomed very well, and people frequently say things that tell they are not comfortable of being around someone who isn't straight.” I have displayed all of the responses to this item in Table 5.23.

Table 5.23

*Responses to "How do you think LGBTQ populations are perceived on campus?"*

Not fully accepted but not discriminated against.
I think they are often seen, but not heard and given the bare minimum to keep them quiet. What I mean by this is that we have resources and we have special organizations, but many students, including a few of my own friends, are still very homophobic and transphobic. So, while we're allowed to exist on campus and be "out," many students would rather not know than know what we identify as.
They are not!
Not well. Some people aren't actively rude and a very small number of people are accepting, but otherwise I feel like lots of people really hate the idea of gay and trans people existing.
Not sure of a singular perception, but I still get the "you don't seem gay" thing now and again.
I'm not sure about this one.
I don't really know. I think most people don't really think about it that much but feel vaguely uncomfortable when confronted with LGBTQ-related issues.
On Yik Yak, they are extremely frowned upon.
An extravagant group from which straight people are too different so they wouldn't understand and wouldn't easily relate to, so they often avoid the LGBTQ group
I just moved to SRU this semester so I'm not sure, but I've heard a few people making homophobic remarks.
They are not welcome very well, and people frequently say things that tell they are not comfortable of being around someone who isn't straight.
Poorly.
I think the majority of people don't really perceive LGBTQ+ people as real. Sure, they know we exist, but they don't expect us to exist in their lives, and so they largely ignore our issues & existence. It's less overt hate (that I've experienced) and more totally blase microaggressions that make me afraid of larger acts of homophobia if I ever come out to my straight friends.
They are perceived by some as accepted, but by many as being "freaks." I've been called names because of being gay.
Seen as stereotypes - all lesbians are butch, all gay men are flamboyant, etc. Seen as outsiders.
Not accepted
Stereotypical
I don't think many people actually give it much thought.
Seen as "it's okay 'they' exist" - strong sense of othering.

There are many supporters of LGBTQ individuals on campus, however people who discriminate against LGBTQ students speak much louder.
Poorly and stereotyped.
As small, weird, and imaginary.
Negatively, especially if you're trans.
A joke/a separate and illegitimate community from non-LGBTQ.
I think the LBGTU does an excellent job of encouraging representation on campus, and many people are welcoming. However, it is clear that some people avoid public events that the LBGTU coordinates.
Shunned
I don't think many people think about that population.
We are perceived as being okay, but few are willing to actually be friends with us once they find out.
I feel the LGBTQ population is thought of as everyone else, no real negativity.
I feel like they're always portrayed as the people who don't really care about anything and who don't get involved.
Mostly perceived well until a person wears clothes that are "for the other sex" or not expressing what our perceived gender is.
They're perceived as "weird," "freaks," etc.
Poorly
I believe that many students have a negative view of LGBTQ students and may perceive their sexual orientation/gender identity as a phase they are going through during college.
I believe lesbian women are widely accepted by both male and female, but gay males are mostly accepted by females and not males. Straight males find it uncomfortable to be around gay males.
I think we're mostly ignored by people who aren't involved in groups or events explicitly related to our issues.
I think that many students recognize that outwardly homophobic behavior is frowned upon, and therefore engage in a moderate level of tolerance and for the most part mind their own business. However, people are incredibly nosy.
Unimportant/nonexistent

Negative perceptions could be linked to a negative campus climate. The perception that the campus climate is negative is certainly a possible reason as to why more than 80% of survey respondents indicated that they choose to conceal their sexual orientation in order to pass as straight.

For the fourth question, respondents were asked, “Are there any questions that we did not ask that cover topics you wish to discuss?” Seven participants answered this question. One participant shared,

Can we please get a Queer Studies program? Or at least more classes with queer subject matter? More frank and open discussion of sexuality and gender in university courses? Can we make some sort of tolerance training mandatory for first-year students (although tolerance as an end in and of itself is far from ideal)?

Another respondent discussed LGBTQ education. She shared,

I am not happy with the lack of LGBTQ+ education on campus. I believe that it would be hugely beneficial to the SRU Community to have such education in University 101 and other common classes that almost everyone takes. I believe (and I might be wrong) that education and exposure is the first step to acceptance of the community, so I think that this education would help the community.

A queer studies program does not exist at SRU, and there are currently only four courses listed on the university registrar’s website which explicitly state that homosexuality and/or LGBTQ topics are discussed in the class. These courses are offered within the College of Education, the Women’s and Gender Studies Program, the psychology department, and the sociology department. This listing does not include any “Special Topics” courses, which indicates a temporary course listing. Interestingly, the topic of tolerance trainings for first year students was mentioned briefly in the focus groups, where Michelle shared that she goes in to University 101 courses and discusses being a lesbian. However, not all University 101 instructors invite LGBTQ speakers to their classes.

Two respondents shared concerns specifically related to transgender students. One stated,

Yes, the administration of the University could do much more to make LGB and especially T students feel more welcome. They could change policies to protect these students from discrimination and they could be more direct in their support of these students.

Another posited, “RM<sup>30</sup>s should be required to complete Safe Zone Training. There is a serious lack of transgender issues awareness within the housing staff, including RMs. I speak as a former RM.” In the focus groups, Justin shared that he attended Safe Zone training as an RM, sharing that it was mandatory. He completed this training in 2007.

After reading the comment above, I contacted SRU’s Housing Office, and confirmed that Safe Zone Training is no longer required of RMs. They did not share why it is no longer a part of their training. When asked, the woman on the phone seemed to become uncomfortable, and then stated that there is “national discomfort about certain diversity trainings.” As discussed in Chapter 2, having RMs complete Safe Zone Training often improves residence hall climates for LGBTQ students (Evans, Reason, & Broido; 2001).

Finally, respondents were asked, “Do you have any other comments?” One respondent stated, “I believe that a great deal more effort needs to be done on SRU's part in addressing the problems of the LGBT community, but especially the Transgender community too, who I know suffers on campus.” Another shared, “There needs to be more advocacy, support, programs and services for LGBTQ students, especially trans students!” In these two quotes the difference between LGB and T students was noted and the importance and need of support for transgender students shared. Concern by

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<sup>30</sup> “RMs” refers to Resident Mentors.

respondents for transgender students at SRU was apparent. Advocacy for T students by LGB respondents was apparent in these comments, but may also be found in the data. Approximately 12% of survey respondents indicated that they had been forced to use the bathroom that they did not identify with, though only 1.5% of respondents indicated that they were transgender. Further, when asked, “From your understanding, do University policies and procedures adequately meet the needs of transgender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people?”, 65.7% of respondents said “no.” Additionally, five (29.4%) of respondents indicated that they had been prevented from using their preferred gender pronouns.

Another respondent suggested that I should further research LGBTQ students in honors programs. She said,

I think that my experience as an honors student (living in a dorm with other honors students, taking classes that are small, intimate, and open-minded, and my experience with faculty and administration), as well as the community with which I have surrounded myself has been absolutely critical to my overall positive experience at SRU, and I think Honors status should perhaps be taken into consideration as a contributing factor in future surveys of LGBTQ+ students.

I had not, until this point, considered the difference in campus climate perceptions between honors students and those who are not honors students within LGBTQ populations. This is a topic that I believe would be interesting to pursue in future research.

### **5.11 Conclusion**

This survey was conducted in order to answer the second part of my research question: “Using GLSEN’s climate study domains, do students who are ‘out’ report different experiences compared to students who are not out? What are those differences?” Overall, my survey results were inconclusive in comparing outness and campus climate domains. It is possible that this lack of cohesiveness may have been alleviated with a higher response rate to the survey. However, throughout Chapter 5 I have detailed trends in the data applicable to the respondents of the survey.

## CHAPTER 6:

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I represent findings in response to my third research question, How do LGBTQ students' experiences reported in the focus groups complement or contrast LGBTQ students' experiences captured in the survey responses? I provide a brief discussion about the study's findings and examine connections to the existing body of literature on LGBT student experience. Additionally, I explore the implications of my study and discuss possible directions for future research.

#### **6.2 Discussion**

This study was designed in order to answer the following research question, which is comprised of three sub-questions:

- 1 How do Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning (LGBTQ) students who are out experience the campus climate at Southern Research University?
  - a. How do LGBTQ students who are “out” describe their lives at Southern Research University?
  - b. When applying GLSEN's climate study domains, do students who are “out” report different experiences compared to students who are not out? What are those differences?



- c. How do LGBTQ students' experiences reported in the focus groups complement or contrast with LGBTQ students' experiences captured in the survey responses?

In Chapter 4, I explored the first sub-question; "How do LGBTQ students describe the effects of being "out" on their lives at Southern Research University?" I used focus groups to examine the experiences of participants. The themes I developed from those focus groups were outness, passing privilege, and affirmation. Also, I developed a construct I called campus climate. In Chapter 5, I discussed the second sub-question, "When applying GLSEN's climate study domains, do students who are "out" report different experiences compared to students who are not out? What are those differences?" I found that there were no statistically significant differences between those who are more out and those who are less out.

In order to answer the third part of my research question, I analyzed the focus group and survey data. I completed data analysis by printing out my findings from both the focus groups and the survey, and then examined the data for commonalities and differences by color-coding my notes. Examining data based on a priori coding schemes is what Saldaña (2009) defined as protocol coding. Saldaña defined protocol coding as a process in which a research codes "according to a pre-established, recommended, standardized, or prescribed system" (p. 130). In this case, the third sub-question defined my coding approach. Coding for similarities and differences guided my coding cycle. I compared the focus group and survey findings. Using the focus group data to inform the survey design meant that I completed two cycles of coding. One cycle of protocol coding was between the themes and salient points I generated and the survey design. The other

cycle of protocol coding was the comparison of data between the focus groups and survey. I ensured that I did not overlook any similarities or differences that coding based on the focus group findings alone may have caused. I represent my findings below.

**6.2.1 Findings from focus group participants and survey respondents.** In this section, I represent my findings of the similarities and differences found between the focus groups and survey data.

***Outness and the process of coming out.*** In the focus groups, all nine participants discussed coming out and being out, as each individual identified as being out. They shared different levels of being out; some were out to all of their friends and colleagues, while others were out only to their friends. In order to measure the complexity of outness, I asked survey respondents to rate their outness on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being “not at all out” and 6 being “completely out.” The mean for outness was 3.5, with a standard deviation of 1.5, which means that respondents grouped closer to the middle of the scale than on the outer ends. This scale was used to examine differences between outness and campus climate perceptions, detailed in Chapter 5, and was a variable used for correlational analyses throughout all survey analyses.

***Outness at home and outness at school.*** In order to compare outness on campus and at home in the survey, I asked respondents to rate their outness at home on the same 1 to 6 scale on which they rated their outness on campus. Both outness scales had means in the center of the scale ( $M=3.5$ ). However, more respondents indicated that they were around a 3-4 for outness on campus ( $SD=1.5$ ), while there was a more even distribution for outness at home ( $SD=2.1$ ).

Four focus group participants discussed being out at home versus being out on campus. Each one either shared that it was easier to be out on campus than at home, or that she had come out on campus before coming out at home. Rhoads (1994) found, too, that students reported that it was easier to be out on campus than at home. Within survey respondents, outness at home and outness on campus were reported at similar levels (M=3.5 for each), while half of the focus group participants reported that being out on campus was easier than being out at home.

***Visibility: Activism and presenting LGBTQ sexual orientations.*** Survey respondents were not given the chance to discuss how being an activist or having a leadership position on campus affected their campus climate perceptions; however, four focus group participants discussed activism and visibility on campus. Too many questions on a survey decrease the likelihood that a respondent will complete the instrument (Fink, 2012). As such I decided not to add another section to the survey in order to not over burden respondents.

Four focus group participants discussed activism and visibility on campus. Renn (2007), Renn and Bilodeau (2005), and Rhoads (1994), argued that LGBTQ students with activist campus leadership roles were more likely to be out than students not in leadership roles. Having visible, active leaders and mentors on campus is important for a positive campus climate (Evans, 2002). School personnel who are out contribute to a positive school environment for LGBTQ students (GLSEN, 2012; Pace, 2004; Payne & Smith, 2010; Quasha, et. al, 2014).

***Contexts of coming out and self-silencing in the classroom.*** Two focus group participants, AJ and Rachel, discussed particular contexts of coming out. Further, AJ and

Michelle discussed the decision to come out in classrooms where they serve in instructor positions. I chose to not measure this on the survey due to space constraints, similar to the section above on visibility and activism.

***Passing privilege.*** Although I did not ask directly about passing privilege in my focus group protocol (Please see Appendix A), participants addressed the topic in all three focus groups. Most participants discussed their ability or inability to pass as straight. Often, they linked passing to their ability to perform or express gender in a way that aligned with binary gender norms.

On the survey, when asked “Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to avoid discrimination?”, the majority of respondents (n = 54, 81.2%) reported “yes.” In Rankin’s (2005) national campus climate study, she found that 51% of LGBTQ students concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity on campus. When asked, “Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to protect your personal safety?” over half (n=36, 54.5%) of respondents indicated “yes.” Generally, respondents agreed with the statement “I make an effort to pass as straight in my classes” (M=2.77 on a scale with 1-4 points). Similarly, respondents agreed with the statements, “I make an effort to pass as straight in my residence hall” (M=2.72) and “I make an effort to pass as straight at campus events” (M=2.70).

The majority of participants in the focus groups and on the survey indicated that they actively concealed their sexual orientation on campus. Many in the focus group shared they benefitted from doing so. An individual who conceals her, hir, or his sexual orientation erases the presence of non-heterosexual orientations on campus. Such

suppression may cause psychological harm, increased ideation of suicide, and increased anxiety (Mustanski, Garofalo, & Emerson, 2010)

Additionally, for those members of LGBTQ communities who can pass, the act of passing reproduces binary gender norms and heteronormativity. Passing privilege underscores selectivity in the coming out process as well. For example, in the focus groups, Sara shared that she analyzed each situation before deciding whether or not to pass as straight or come out. Mayo (2007) posited that the decision to come out or not was a process dependent upon specific, situational context. Also, I argue that passing prevents questioning students and students who are not out from identifying potential allies and support in LGBTQ communities.

The act of selectively passing must also be considered in conjunction with my findings concerning being out at home versus being out at school. The literature surrounding the topic, as well as findings from my study, point to a difference in how often students are out at home versus as school. Though it is easier to be out on campus, we must consider the fact that over 80% of SRU students report concealing their sexual orientation on campus. This is something that should be studied further in the future.

*Avoidance and the use of symbolic language.* Four participants; Sara, Michelle, AJ, and Justin, shared instances of using symbolic language in order to avoid potential discrimination on campus. Similar to my decision not to include activism and visibility on the survey, I did not measure avoidance and the use of symbolic language. However, the data I coded for passing privilege, and therefore, the questions I asked on the survey concerning passing privilege, encompassed similar ideas. Focus group participants shared that they used symbolic language in order to avoid coming out when they did not have

proper situated knowledge in order to discern safety. I argue that if an individual was not attempting to pass as straight or benefitting from passing privilege, they would not feel the need to utilize symbolic language or dress.

***Trans-ness and clothing.*** On the survey, I asked respondents if they had ever been disciplined because of or prevented from wearing clothes of another gender. No respondents indicated that they had experienced discipline because of or were prevented from wearing clothing that did not match their gender expression or identity.

In the focus groups, Rachel shared that often she worried about dressing in clothing normatively assigned to women before she came out as trans. Disciplinary action due to clothing choices was something that was present in secondary spaces across the country (GLSEN 2011; 2012; 2013), but it did not appear in this study that this was a problem at SRU.

***Affirmation: Self-affirmation and affirmation from campus resources.*** In order to measure affirmation on the survey instrument, I asked respondents to share spaces on campus where they felt “celebrated and/or nurtured as an LGBTQ person.” Respondents answered this open-ended question by sharing positive experiences with the LBGT SU, the Feminist Union, the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, on campus events and also mentioned specific staff members and professors. Five focus group participants shared that they received affirmation from campus resources. They discussed the LBGT SU, on campus events, and the Feminist Union as well.

Two respondents discussed that they felt as though their sexuality was “accepted as background” or that they “don’t flaunt” their sexuality. These comments are similar to four participants in the focus groups, who shared that they benefitted primarily from self-

affirmation and did not feel the need to personally seek affirmation from campus resources. Overall, LGBTQ students benefit from positive campus resources at SRU and positive self-affirmation from within themselves.

***Campus climate.*** On the survey, over half of respondents (50.8%, n=34) reported that they often or frequently heard derogatory or biased language from other students. About 20% of respondents shared that they had experienced verbal harassment based on their perceived or actual sexual orientation, and about 14% indicated that they had experienced verbal harassment based on their perceived or actual gender identity. Although survey respondents shared that they rarely heard faculty and staff use biased language, one respondent shared that a professor told him “he didn’t like gays.”

During the focus groups, Rachel and Alex discussed being harassed. Rachel shared also that a professor told her that he did not agree with transgender individuals needing access to gender-neutral bathrooms.

While harassment based on perceived or actual gender identity was not shared by many L, G, B, T, and/or Q students at SRU, I argue that noting when it has occurred is worthwhile. If SRU were to develop policies and procedures to prevent these instances of harassment, protect the victims from attacks, and hold accountable those who perpetuate harassment and violence, campus climate would likely improve.

***Greek Life.*** Although Greek Life was not an area of campus life that I first considered when deciding how to measure campus climate, participants addressed the topic in all three focus groups, and respondents reported feeling unsafe in both fraternity houses (n=35, 53.0%), and sorority houses (n=24, 36.4%). Responding to the open-ended

questions, 19 (28.9%) respondents indicated that they felt unsafe or unwelcomed at events hosted by Greek Life organizations.

In one of the focus groups, Alex shared their<sup>31</sup> experience having multiple fraternity bids withdrawn after they came out as genderqueer and pansexual. Similarly, six survey respondents shared that they had been denied membership in a sorority or fraternity based primarily on identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning.

The Office of Greek Life has a non-discrimination policy in place that includes non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. However, focus group participants and survey respondents have experienced anti-LGBTQ discrimination from Greek Life organizations.

*Navigating classroom dynamics.* Around 15% of survey respondents indicated that they felt as though their grades had suffered because of their sexual orientation, and 3.1% indicated that they felt as though their grades had suffered because of their gender identity. Within the survey data, there was no relationship between outness and negative academic outcomes. Hostile school climate and educational outcomes were not pursued in detail within the survey, as focus group participants did not share many negative classroom experiences. Two focus group participants shared negative experiences within the classroom that affected their academic performance.

Participants seldom connected low academic performance to anti-LGBT discrimination. However, Garvey, Taylor, and Rankin (2015) and researchers at GLSEN (2013) found that academic achievement for LGBTQ students improves due to a positive campus climate.

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<sup>31</sup> Alex prefers to use the gender pronouns “they” and “their.”



***Student organizations.*** Five focus group participants shared positive experiences with student organizations. In open-response questions on the survey, 34.8% of respondents indicated that they felt celebrated and nurtured in the LBGT SU, and 9% shared that they felt supported in the Feminist Union. These two organizations were also mentioned specifically in the focus groups. Quasha, McCabe, College, and Ortiz (2014) and GLSEN (2012) documented that affirming student organizations contributed to a positive campus climate.

***Safety and discomfort.*** Survey respondents answered questions concerning their perceptions about safety on campus. Almost half (48.5%, n=32) of survey respondents indicated that they felt unsafe on campus due to their sexual orientation. The percentage of respondents feeling unsafe in my study is higher than the percentage of respondents feeling unsafe in Rankin's (2005) national campus climate study Rankin found that 20% of LGBTQ students feared for their physical safety while on campus.

In the focus groups, two participants shared specific instances on campus in which they felt unsafe due to sexual orientation and gender expression. One participant shared that often she felt unsafe due to the possibility of being outed as a transwoman. However, four participants shared that they felt safe on campus in regards to their sexuality and/or gender expression. One participant specified that she felt less safe as a woman than she did as a lesbian. Roughly 20% of respondents (n=14) indicated that they felt unsafe on campus due to their sex, while 9% (n=6) shared that they felt unsafe due to their gender identity.

In the focus groups, Michelle and AJ shared that there were comfortable on campus. However, Scott and Rachel shared experiences in which they felt unsafe

specifically within their residence hall. Only three (4.5%) survey respondents reported feeling unsafe in their residence halls. Evans, Reason, and Broido (2001) argued in their findings concerning residence hall climates for LGBTQ students that resident mentors who completed a safe zone or another training for allies were more likely to show tolerant and welcoming attitudes to LGBT students.

Unlike the survey respondents, half of the focus group participants shared that they felt safe on campus. However, they also each shared negative experiences on campus. It would seem that the abstract idea of “safety” encompasses something different to each individual – a variation that I would like to examine in future research. Within my study, it appeared as though the expectations for as to what constituted safety were low. It is interesting to consider this in context with the fact that over 80% of survey respondents have indicated that they actively try to conceal their sexual orientation and pass as straight. If students feel as though it is safer to come out on campus than at home, why are over 80% still attempting to pass as straight? I do not have a hypothesis as to why this difference occurred, but I plan to examine this disparity in future research.

***Gender-neutral bathrooms.*** Two focus group participants discussed the need for gender-neutral bathrooms on campus. Although the lack of gender-neutral bathrooms was not addressed on the survey, 11.8% (n=8) of survey respondents indicated that they had been “required to use the bathroom that [they] did not identify with.”

I am concerned about the lack of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus, because I see the absence as both a safety issue and an academic issue. Primarily, there is a safety concern, as trans or gender nonconforming individuals may experience harassment or assault when entering a bathroom from anti-LGBT individuals. Academically, trans or

gender nonconforming individuals may miss extended periods of class, because they need to use the bathroom and gender-neutral bathrooms are not nearby. This is not an issue with which cisgendered students struggle, as they have easy access to nearby bathroom facilities.

***The South.*** In the focus groups, AJ, Sara, and Michelle discussed the South as a unique cultural space. They generally agreed that they felt as though southerners used a guise of “Southern hospitality” to hide their actual hostility towards others. I did not ask about this on the survey due to space constraints. However, as the South is the cultural context in which the study took place, I feel as though the context of the South is present within my findings (for example, respondents indicated that they were not comfortable around Christian student organizations, which aligns with Sears’ work (1991; 1992) stating that many individuals in the South use religion as a way to invalidate LGBT individuals). I would like to examine the affects of the cultural space of the South on participants in future research.

**6.2.2 Connections to LGBTQ literature.** In this section, I will discuss connections from my data to the literature surrounding LGBTQ experiences.

***Coming out.*** All nine focus group participants discussed the process of coming out and most discussed the importance of context when coming out. This reflects literature in the field, as scholars and researchers have found that coming out is a process often fraught with multiple considerations, including the contextual surroundings of each individual (Butler, 1990; GLSEN 2013; Mayo, 2007; Rankin, 2003; Sedgwick, 1990).

***Greek Life.*** In Chapter 4, I represented participants’ experiences with Greek Life, almost all of which were negative. I shared survey findings in Chapter 5 concerning

survey respondents' concerns about safety in fraternity and sorority houses. My findings contrast with Welter's (2012) study that reflected positive experiences with Greek Life organizations by LGB students. However, Welter did find that LGB students had an overall negative feeling about Greek Life in her study, which is consistent with data from both the focus groups and survey respondents in my study.

***Academic outcomes.*** A positive campus climate generally contributes to higher levels of success and achievement for LGBTQ students (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015; GLSEN, 2013). Approximately 15% of survey respondents indicated that they felt that their sexual orientation had negatively affected their grades, and two focus group participants shared negative classroom experiences.

McGuire, Anderson, Toomey, and Russell (2010) found that trans students were likely to report negative academic outcomes related to their gender identity and expression. In the focus groups, Rachel shared that she had experienced negative academic outcomes such as dropping a class and being penalized when using her preferred gender pronouns due to her gender identity. I did not find any significant differences in my survey data between LGB and T/Genderqueer respondents.

**6.2.3 Theoretical connections.** One of the themes I developed for Chapter 4 was passing privilege, and survey findings in Chapter 5 reflected that over 80% of respondents concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity on campus "to avoid discrimination."

Butler (1988; 1990) rejected binary conceptions that restrict gender identity, identification, and desire to categories of male/female, masculine/feminine, and man/woman. When considering passing and passing privilege, I argue that reflecting

upon Butler's critique of binaries is important. An individual who makes an effort to conceal her, hir, or his sexuality and/or gender identity might be protecting her-, hir-, or himself from heterosexist harassment and violence, but in doing so, she, sie or he is continuing to reproduce binary gender norms and erase sexual minority orientations. The fact that participants and respondents felt they had to choose between their own safety and presenting gender nonconforming identities and /or as a sexual minority is unconscionable.

Lorde's work (1984; 1988) and Collins' (2012) informed my study as well. In particular Lorde's work prompted me to consider the intersections of sexuality and race. Although the majority of my focus group participants were White (88%, n=8) and the majority of my survey respondents were White (82.8%, n=53), one focus group participant identified as "Black." Justin's experiences as a gay Black male were qualitatively different compared to White focus group participants. He discussed the difficulty of being gay within "the Black community." He shared that he did not rush a fraternity because,

[I felt like I would be] criticized, and maybe mocked or picked on, so I probably prevented myself from having some bad experiences [by not rushing]. I thought about joining a fraternity before... [But] because of my sexuality, I decided not to... [I also decided not to join because of] the Black community in general, but Black men especially – I feel like they're really on you about being very masculine... I wanted to have a brotherhood... I decided not to, because I am a homosexual man, and I didn't want to get subjected to whatever I may be subjected to.

Justin felt that because the Black community – and in particular, Black men – expected “very masculine” behavior that he might be the target of heterosexist harassment as a Black, gay man.

Lorde (1984; 1988) and Collins (2012) argued that interlocking systems of oppression included intersections of race and sexuality. Lorde shared that the interlocking racially-based and sexuality-based oppressions must be examined in combination, as they cannot be separated. Justin’s concerns about joining Greek Life as a gay Black man must be examined with both race and sexuality in mind. Further, Collins (2012) would argue that Justin’s identities as a gay Black man inform his perceptions. In order to understand Justin’s perceptions – and any racial minority individual’s perceptions – demands the examination of all aspects of his identity and how they interlock to inform his truth.

Collins (2012) influenced my methodological decisions more than she influenced my theoretical backings. She argued that qualitative research was valuable in understanding the complex experiences and perceptions of oppressed populations and that quantitative research was an important vehicle for enacting change. In Chapter 3, I adopted her argument about the importance of both methodological approaches in order to justify a mixed methods approach for this study. In using both qualitative focus groups and quantitative surveys, I have been able to understand both breadth and depth of the experiences of LGBTQ students on campus.

### **6.3 Concluding Thoughts**

This study began as a means to an end. Three years ago, the LGBT Student Resource Office’s Director requested my assistance in conducting a climate study. After pursuing further support and permissions, our efforts were stopped by SRU’s Chief

Diversity Officer. It was at that time that I stormed into my advisor's office, furious at what I saw as an injustice to both the LBGT SRO and the LGBTQ populations on campus and wanting to make a difference. Further discussions with Emily Greytak, Lead Researcher at GLSEN, about my difficulty in performing the climate study led me to the question about how outness can affect climate experiences and perceptions. She shared that researchers at GLSEN were becoming more interested in the different experiences of students who are out versus those who are not. She shared that there had been significant differences in findings between those who are out and those who were not in their national climate study for secondary students (GLSEN, 2013). This was not the case in my study, as I did not find significant relationships between campus climate domains and outness.

In Chapter 1, I discussed my hope that this study would provide insights into (1) the intersections of the anti-LGBT discrimination heterosexual and cisgender privileged, political, and religious conservatives continue to perpetuate (2) the ways LGBTQ students enrolled at a PWI in the South endure such discrimination. My first goal was met through my examination of the campus climate at SRU.

While some participants in the focus groups and respondents to the survey felt safe on campus, many did not due to their sexuality (48.5%), sex (22.7%), gender identity (9.1%), or race (9.1%). About 20% of respondents shared that they experienced heterosexist verbal harassment, and few (1.5%) shared that they have been the victims of physical violence.

My second goal in this study was to understand the ways in which LGBTQ students enrolled at a PWI in the South endure heterosexist discrimination. This was

examined most thoroughly in Chapter 4, section 4.2: Passing Privilege and Section 4.3: Affirmation. While three focus group participants (AJ, Michelle, and Paloma) shared that affirmation came from within, five participants discussed positive campus resources that had helped them affirm their identity. Affirming identity-based spaces can greatly contribute to a more positive campus climate (Renn, 2007; & Bilodeau, 2005). Participants discussed positive resources at SRU, including the LGBTQ community picnic (the “gay picnic”), the counseling center, the LGBT Student Union, the student-run magazine, and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs.

Another aspect of enduring heterosexist discrimination at SRU is through concealment of one’s sexuality in order to pass as straight. Over 80% of survey respondents shared that they attempt to pass as straight. Passing should not be a solution to anticipating anti-LGBT discrimination – instead, campus climate needs to change in order to be more affirming of sexual minorities.

After completing this study, I’m afraid that I have now more questions than when I began. I have no doubt that I will continue to pursue research concerning LGBTQ populations on university campuses. I also know that I will continue to work toward understanding the experiences of LGBTQ youth in the South.

## **6.4 Implications**

In this section I have provided (1) specific practice and policy recommendations for the university and (2) implications for the larger community of scholars studying LGBTQ issues.



#### **6.4.1 Recommendations for SRU.**

- A. Due to participants and respondents sharing negative experiences with Greek Life, I recommend examining the existence (or lack thereof) of non-discrimination policies within both fraternities and sororities. Greek Life organizations would benefit also from education about their non-discrimination policies, as well as education about LGBTQ populations and issues.
- a. This should include all members of the National IFC, Pan-Hellenic Councils, and the National Pan-Hellenic Council.
- B. Respondents and participants shared experiences of verbal harassment on campus. I recommend that SRU establish and enforce more thorough non-discriminatory policies than those that are currently in place, which include punishments for students and faculty who break such policies. I acknowledge that enforcement may be difficult as it has been my experience that individuals who perpetrate anti-LGBT discrimination like to cite the first amendment. However, hate speech is not protected, and SRU administrators need to address speech that discriminates and promotes hate.
- a. The university should revisit the non-discrimination policy concerning gender identity and expression. Though these protections are mentioned in the policy, trans students suffer increased hardships at SRU.
  - b. Athletic events and athletic facilities in particular were places that survey respondents indicated were problematic. Education concerning non-discrimination policies should focus on these areas as well as other general campus spaces.

- C. Due to participants and respondents sharing negative experiences with anti-LGBT discrimination within their residence halls, I recommend requiring Safe Zone Training for all Resident Mentors.
- D. Respondents and participants shared their concern over the lack of gender-neutral bathrooms on campus. I recommend that gender-neutral bathrooms be established immediately in each campus building, in order to improve the campus climate and potentially increase class time for gender nonconforming and transgender students.
- E. I recommend that SRU conduct a climate study at minimum every four years in order to gauge the climate perceptions for LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty and to establish a task force comprised of faculty, staff, and students to analyze the climate surveys to refine and revise policy and practice at SRU for LGBTQ students, staff, and faculty in order to maintain a positive campus climate. I suggest every four years because this should give an appropriate amount of time for students to matriculate.
- F. Due to my own hardships in conducting this study, I recommend tolerance and sensitivity training, as well as a delivery of a curriculum concerning LGBTQ students, to all faculty, staff, and higher administration officials at SRU. This training should focus on LGBTQ populations and the issues they face in IHEs.
  - a. All faculty and staff interfacing with students: this includes new and part-time faculty and staff, adjunct faculty, graduate students, graduate student teaching assistants and instructors, and any other individual who spends time with students.

- G. Similarly, I suggest that all students learn about LGBTQ populations during the Freshman 101 and Graduate Student 101 class at SRU. This should be an established part of the curriculum for all incoming students.
- H. Further, there should be a review of university curricula regarding the absence LGBTQ-related curricula. More classes should be established concerning LGBTQ individuals. As I discussed on page 186, only four departments currently list LGBTQ related classes; the College of Education, Women's and Gender Studies, Psychology, and Sociology.
- I. SRU officials should continue to provide affirming events (such as the "gay picnic") for LGBTQ populations. It may be beneficial to add more of these affirming or welcoming events as well.
- J. Participants appreciated campus news that is inclusive of LGBTQ populations. It may improve campus climate to produce more LGBTQ-inclusive news coverage.
- K. Finally, SRU officials should acknowledge LGBTQ justice advocacy that is done by faculty, staff, and students. Particular staff members in SRUs division of student affairs received compliments for their efforts during this study. These individuals should be celebrated and recognized (for example, by staff awards) for their improvement of the overall campus climate.

**6.4.2 Implications for the larger community of scholars studying LGBTQ issues.**

- a. I call for more work to be done on southern LGBTQ experiences. There is little research available on LGBTQ populations within this specific geopolitical and cultural space.

b. I would recommend examining the relationship between passing and outness further, as this seems to be a potential area of study that is information-rich.

## **6.5 Future Research**

In the future, I plan to continue pursuing this line of inquiry. Further exploration of how outness affects perceptions of campus climate may lead to a greater understanding of how Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) can be improved for LGBTQ populations. GLSEN's (2013) study found that high school aged respondents reported different experiences in school based on their outness. I see no reason why the relationship between outness and campus climate for IHEs would not follow the same pattern. Unfortunately, my survey did not have a large enough sample size to draw generalizable inferences.

I would be curious to explore as well the concept of passing on a university campus. Over 80% of survey respondents indicated that they attempted to hide their sexuality and pass as straight on campus. Why do LGBTQ youth at SRU feel the need to do this? How do they make decisions about where and when to conceal their sexuality and to be out? Do they connect their feelings of safety and/or comfort to instances of passing? There are many questions, and lots of place to initiate new lines of inquiry. I would like to pursue an exploratory study using a qualitative design to examine the complexity of passing.

Additionally, this study has inspired me to pursue research concerning LGBTQ experiences as they intersect with Greek Life. The topic of Greek Life was initiated by focus group participants and discussed in every focus group. Gaining a deeper understanding of LGBTQ experiences through different stages of entering and existing

within Greek Life organizations may help researchers in the field to better understand how these organizations perpetuate heterosexist ideologies. This understanding could help researchers understand how Greek Life organizations could be more positive spaces for LGBTQ students, too. I would be interested in specifically examining the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in leadership positions within Greek Life organizations.

Leadership positions on campus can improve an individual's perceptions of campus climate (Renn 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). I am curious about whether or not leadership positions within Greek Life organizations would be beneficial, as so many survey respondents shared negative experiences with Greek Life organizations.

**6.4.1 Changes to the focus groups.** In future iterations of this research, I will ensure that I question participants about the cultural space of the South when examining their experiences. I will replace the words “celebrated and nurtured” in the protocol, as three participants suggested that “comfortable” would be a better word. I coded using the word “affirmation.” Studying other research on “comfort” and/or “affirmation” in k-20 contexts will inform my future research. Overall, I think the focus group protocol, too, was productive and would use it to further study experiences of LGBTQ populations in IHEs.

**6.4.2 Changes to the survey.** This study would benefit greatly from an expanded sample. In its current state, survey data gathered are unlikely to be generalizable, and I cannot assume that the data set accurately reflects the population I was hoping to study (Fink, 2013; Fowler, 2014). As I discussed in Chapter 3, I did not anticipate the level of difficulty in reaching potential respondents.

I believe that it would be interesting to add a variable asking about each respondent's status, or lack thereof, as an honors student. This idea stems from a suggestion given by a survey respondent who is an honor's student, and shared that he is in smaller, more open-minded classes. He said,

I think that my experience as an honors student (living in a dorm with other honors students, taking classes that are small, intimate, and open-minded, and my experience with faculty and administration), as well as the community with which I have surrounded myself has been absolutely critical to my overall positive experience at SRU, and I think Honors status should perhaps be taken into consideration as a contributing factor in future surveys of LGBTQ+ students. The idea of an Honors College providing a different and specific space on campus for LGBTQ students is not something I had considered previously. I would be interested in pursuing this topic further in the future.

Overall, I would use this survey instrument again in measuring campus climate for LGBTQ students.

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## **APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL**

### **Introduction**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group on your experiences as LGBTQ students who are out on campus. I want to assure you that anything you decide to share in our discussion today is confidential, though there is always a risk of a breach of confidentiality. What this means is that nothing you say will be identifiable, and I will at no point share your names with anyone in any iteration of my research.

I will be recording our conversation and taking notes in order to ensure that I capture the most accurate representation of your perspectives and experiences. I will also contact you in the future in order to check with you to make sure that I am representing you and what you say correctly.

I have some specific questions to prompt our discussion, but I am very interested in hearing a wide range of thoughts on the issues of coming out, being out, and being selectively out on campus – so please feel free to elaborate on anything you wish to, to ask each other or myself questions, and to let me know if there is anything with which you disagree. At some points during our conversation, I may need to interrupt you in order to assure that everyone is heard and offered a chance to speak, but please be assured that I will do my best to keep such interruptions to a minimum. I want to make sure that we cover enough ground here, but I also want to make sure that we get you out of here on time!

### **Questions**

1. How would you describe your “outness” on campus?

Possible prompts:

- a. with friends
- b. with faculty
- c. with staff
- d. in class
- e. participating in student organizations
- f. at campus events

2. How do you think LGBTQ populations are perceived on campus?

3. Describe the areas on campus where you perceive that LGBTQ people are not welcomed.

- Can you tell me about any spaces on campus where you feel uncomfortable?

4. Do you feel safe on campus? Tell me why or why not.

- If no, what are things you think this campus could do to cultivate safety

5. Talk about times when you have felt celebrated and nurtured on campus.

Possible prompts:

- a. with friends
- b. with faculty
- c. with staff
- d. in class
- e. participating in student organizations
- f. at campus events

6. Please share how being out on campus has or has not affected your academic performance.

7. What are other ways in which you believe that being out has affected your experiences on campus?

8. Tell me about any other experiences that you think would be important for me to know about being an L, G, B, T, or Q student on campus.

## **APPENDIX B: FOCUS**

### **GROUP – INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT**

#### **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:**

You are being asked to volunteer for a research study conducted by Leia K. Cain. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Studies Department at the [REDACTED]. The purpose of this study is to address a critical gap in the literature concerning the lived experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and/or Queer (LGBTQ) students who are “out” on the university campus in the southeastern United States. This study will examine the hypothesis that coming or being out on a university campus in the southeast affects experiences of campus climate. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a member of this listserv. This study is being done at sites that will be decided upon based on the convenience to participants and will involve approximately 12 volunteers. This form explains what you will be asked to do if you decide to participate in this study. Please read it carefully and feel free to ask questions before you make a decision about participating.

#### **PROCEDURES:**

*If you agree to be in this study, the following will happen:*

1. *You will be asked to complete a focus group (group interview) about your experiences on campus.*
2. *I will audio record our discussion/interview to ensure I accurately capture the details that you provide.*

#### **DURATION:**

Focus groups (group interviews) will be kept to three to four individuals and will last approximately one hour. The focus groups will meet at a time and location that is beneficial for participants.

#### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:**

Focus Groups: Others in the group will hear what you say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. We cannot guarantee what you say will remain completely private, but we ask that you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Loss of Confidentiality: There is the risk of a breach of confidentiality, despite the steps that will be taken to protect your identity.

**BENEFITS:**

Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally. However, this research may help myself and others on campus to better understand LGBTQ students' experiences on campus. This research, once published, may also assist other researchers studying LGBTQ issues.

**COSTS:**

There will be no costs to you for participating in this study (other than parking or transportation).

**PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS:**

You will not be paid for participating in this study.

**USC STUDENT PARTICIPATION:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. Your participation, non-participation and/or withdrawal will not affect your grades or your relationship with your professors, college(s), or Southern Research University.

**CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your express written permission, unless required by law. The information will be securely stored in locked files and on password protected computers. The results of the study may be published or presented at seminars, but the report will not include your name or other identifying information about you.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate, or to stop participating at any time, for any reason without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please call or email the Principal Investigator.

I have been given a chance to ask questions about this research study. These questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have any more questions about my participation in this study or study related injury, I may contact Leia Cain at (704) 699-0101 or email [LeiaCain@email.sc.edu](mailto:LeiaCain@email.sc.edu).

If I have any questions, problems, or concerns, desire further information or wish to offer input, I may contact Lisa Marie Johnson, IRB Manager, Office of Research Compliance, [REDACTED]  
phone: [REDACTED] or email: [REDACTED] This includes any questions about my rights as a research subject in this study.

I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form for my own records.

## **APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP – RECRUITMENT E-MAIL**

Dear USC student,

You are receiving this e-mail because you are (a member of BGLSA / subscribed to the listserv associated with the LGBT Student Services office). I am contacting you in hopes that you might be interested in participating in a focus group concerning the experiences of LGBTQ students who are out on campus. The extent to which you are out, or the number of people to whom you are out, is not a factor in determining your eligibility for participation.

### Duration

Focus groups (group interviews) will be kept to three to four individuals and will last approximately one hour. The focus groups will meet at a time and location that is beneficial for participants.

### Informed Consent

If you agree to participate, you will be given an informed consent form prior to the start of the focus group. At that time we will review the questions I will ask and I will answer any questions you may have. After all participants consent to participate we will begin our focus group. As stated in the informed consent form, the focus group will be recorded.

### Risks of Participation

As with all research there is a risk of breach of confidentiality. In order to protect your confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms, password protect any and all files generated, and utilize confidentiality agreements if transcriptionists are employed.

There is also a risk that discussions may potentially trigger memories of emotional encounters, which might include both positive and negative experiences on campus. I will have information at each focus group session about various support services on campus.

### Benefits of Participation

Taking part in this study is not likely to benefit you personally. However, this research may help myself and others on campus to better understand LGBTQ students' experiences on campus. This research, once published, may also assist other researchers studying LGBTQ issues.

### Confidentiality of Records

All information gathered will remain confidential. All audio and text files will be kept on a password-protected computer at the [REDACTED] and at the

home of Leia K. Cain. The results of the study may be published or presented at meetings, but your identity will not be revealed under any circumstances. Instead, I will employ the use of pseudonyms in order to maintain your privacy.

#### Contact Persons

For more information concerning this research, or if you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, you should contact Leia Cain at [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] You may also contact my advisor, [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact:

[REDACTED]

#### Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason, without negative consequences. In the event that you do withdraw from this study, the information you have already provided will be kept in a confidential manner or destroyed, per your instructions.

**APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP – IRB APPROVAL**

**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH  
APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW**

This is to certify that the research proposal: **Pro00044333**

Entitled: *Experiences of Campus Climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) Students who are Out*

Submitted by:

Principal Investigator: Leia K. Cain

College:

Department:

was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), the referenced study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **5/11/2015**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research protocol could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board ([REDACTED] IRB). If you have questions, contact [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Lisa M. Johnson  
IRB Manager

## APPENDIX E – SURVEY INSTRUMENT

### Introduction

Welcome to the SRU LGBTQ Climate Survey!

You received a link to this survey because you are currently a registered student at Southern Research University. The questions on this survey are aimed toward discovering how our campus climate is for students who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and/or Questioning (LGBTQ). The survey should take around 10 - 15 minutes.

All of your answers are completely anonymous, and there is no linking of your IP address or e-mail address to your responses.

This survey is being conducted as part of a doctoral student's dissertation, and is not endorsed by the [REDACTED]. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please feel free to contact the Principle Investigator, Leia K. Cain, at [REDACTED], or her advisor on this project, [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED].

To participate in this survey, please advance to the next page. If you do not consent to participating in this survey, please exit out of your browser. Thank you!



## School Safety

1.) Do you feel unsafe on campus because of your perceived or actual...

(Please check all that apply)

Sex

Gender Identity

Race or Ethnicity

Sexual Orientation

2.) Do you avoid any of the following places on campus because they feel unsafe or uncomfortable? (Check all that apply.)

Bathrooms

Athletic Centers (The Strom, Blatt)

The Russell House

The Horseshoe

Fraternity Houses

Sorority Houses

Classroom Buildings

Residence Halls

Dining Halls

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3.) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements concerning your feelings of physical safety.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel safe in my residence hall.				
I feel safe in campus classrooms.				
I feel safe participating in and contributing to class.				

4.) During the last academic year, how many times did you skip a class or work on campus because you felt unsafe or uncomfortable due to your perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity?

I have not missed a class or work on campus for this reason.

1-2 times

3-5 times

6 or more times

5.) During the last academic year, how many times did you skip an on campus event or student organization meeting because you felt unsafe or uncomfortable due to your perceived or actual sexual orientation or gender identity?

I have not missed an event or student organization meeting on campus for this reason.

1-2 times

3-5 times

6 or more times

6.) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement concerning your feelings of physical safety.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Overall, I consider the University be a safe place.				

## Exposure to Biased Language

1.) Please indicate how often you hear the following remarks around campus from other students.

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
"That's so gay."				
"No homo."				
Derogatory remarks about sexuality such as "faggot," "dyke," etc.				
Derogatory remarks about gender identity such as "tranny," etc.				
Other remarks (please describe below)				

[Text box for "other."]

2.) Please indicate how often you hear the following remarks around campus from faculty or staff.

	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Frequently
"That's so gay."				
"No homo."				
Derogatory remarks about sexuality such as "faggot," "dyke," etc.				
Derogatory remarks about gender identity such as "tranny," etc.				
Other (please describe below)				

[Text box for "other."]

3.) On a scale of 1-4, how much does hearing anti-LGBT remarks on campus bother you?

1   2   3   4

Not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ A lot

## **Experiences of Harassment and Assault at School**

1.) Have you ever experienced verbal harassment (hate speech, slurs, etc.) on campus due to your actual or perceived sexual orientation?

Yes

No

2.) Have you ever experienced verbal harassment (hate speech, slurs, etc.) on campus due to your gender identity, expression, or perceived gender?

Yes

No

3.) I have personally experienced verbal harassment...

Please check all that apply.

In classrooms on campus.

In my residence hall.

At athletic events.

At non-athletic events on campus.

Walking around campus.

I have not personally experienced verbal harassment.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

4.) Have you been threatened with or experienced physical violence on campus due to your perceived or actual sexual orientation?

Yes

No

5.) Have you been threatened with or experienced physical violence on campus due to your gender identity or perceived gender?

Yes

No

6.) I have personally experienced physical violence...

Please check all that apply.

In classrooms on campus.

In my residence hall.

At athletic events.

At non-athletic events on campus.

I have not personally experienced physical violence.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reporting of School-Based Harassment and Assault

1.) When homophobic phrases or slurs are used in front of faculty or staff members, how often have you experienced the faculty or staff member intervene or do something about it?

Never

Sometimes

Often

Always

I have not experienced homophobic phrases or slurs being used in front of faculty or staff members.

2.) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel that the University takes sufficient action to provide a supportive environment for LGBTQ students.				
The University thoroughly addresses issues related to sexual orientation.				
The University thoroughly addresses issues related to gender identity.				
The University has visible leadership from the administration regarding issues of sexual orientation.				
The University has visible leadership from the administration regarding issues of gender identity.				

3.) From your understanding, do University policies and procedures adequately meet the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and questioning people?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

[Text box]

4.) From your understanding, do University policies and procedures adequately meet the needs of transgender, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming people?

Yes

No

Why or why not?

[Text box]

5.) Do you know where to go on campus to find support for LGBTQ issues?

Yes

No

### Experiences of Discrimination at School

1.) Please indicate below to what extent you feel LGBTQ individuals are accepted on campus.

	Not at all accepted	Sometimes accepted	Often accepted	Always accepted
Gay individuals				
Lesbian individuals				
Bisexual individuals				
Transgender individuals				
Queer or questioning individuals				

2.) Which of the following have you experienced at the University?

(Please check all that apply)

Disciplined for identifying as LGBT

Prevented from using preferred name

Prevented from using preferred gender pronouns

Required to use the bathroom that you did not identify with

Prevented from joining an athletic team due to identifying as LGBT

Prevented from joining a student organization due to identifying as LGBT

Prevented from joining a sorority or fraternity due to identifying as LGBT

Disciplined because of or prevented from wearing clothes of another gender

Prevented from discussing or writing about LGBT topics in classroom assignments

### Hostile School Climate and Educational Outcomes

1.) Have you ever dropped a class because of negative treatment by the instructor related to your perceived or actual sexuality?

Yes

No

2.) Have you ever dropped a class because of negative treatment by the instructor related to your perceived or actual gender identity?

Yes

No

3.) Do you feel as though your grades have suffered due to hardships experienced because of your sexual orientation or gender identity?

Yes

No

4.) Do you feel as though your grades have suffered due to hardships experienced because of your gender identity?

Yes

No



### Passing Privilege

1.) Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to avoid discrimination?

Yes

No

2.) Have you ever concealed your sexual orientation or gender identity on campus in order to protect your personal safety?

Yes

No

3.) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. If an option does not apply, please choose "N/A."

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I make an effort to pass as straight in my classes.					
I make an effort to pass as straight in my residence hall.					
I make an effort to pass as straight at campus events.					

4.) Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. If an option does not apply, please choose "N/A."

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity in classes.					
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity in my residence hall.					
I make an effort to conceal my gender identity at campus events.					

**Open-Ended Questions**

1.) Are there areas on campus (departments, student organizations, etc.) where you feel as though you are celebrated and/or nurtured as an LGBTQ person?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe.

[Large text box]

2.) Are there areas on campus (departments, student organizations, etc.) where you would feel uncomfortable as an LGBTQ person OR you perceive that LGBTQ people are not welcomed?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe.

[Large text box]

3.) How do you think the LGBTQ population is perceived on campus?

[Large text box]

4.) Are there any questions that we did not ask that cover topics you wish to discuss?

If so, please describe.

[Large text box]

5.) Do you have any other comments?

[Large text box]

## Demographics

1.) Which best describes your status at the University?

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Graduate Student – Certificate

Graduate Student – Master's

Graduate Student – Doctoral

Staff

Faculty

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

2.) What is your major or program?

[Drop down menu]

3.) Which best describes your living situation?

On-campus residence hall

Fraternity or Sorority house

Off-campus home or apartment

Off-campus home or apartment with parents

4.) How would you best describe your sexuality and/or sexual orientation?

Heterosexual or Straight

Gay

Lesbian

Bisexual

Pansexual

Queer

Questioning

Another sexual orientation not listed: \_\_\_\_\_

5.) How would you describe your gender identity?

*Note: Cisgender is defined as an identity label wherein a person's gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth (e.g., what the doctor put on your birth certificate)..*

Cisgender Man

Cisgender Woman

Transgender Man

Transgender Woman

Genderqueer

Another gender identity not listed: \_\_\_\_\_

6.) How would you describe your racial or ethnic background? Please check all that apply.

African American or Black

American Indian or Alaskan Native

Asian or Pacific Islander

Caucasian or White

Latino/a, Chicano/a, or Hispanic

Middle Eastern

Another racial or ethnic background not listed: \_\_\_\_\_

7.) What is your age?

[Drop down menu]

8.) Would you describe yourself as a person with a disability?

Yes

No

9.) How "out" do you consider yourself on campus?

1 2 3 4 5 6

Not at all out ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Completely Out

10.) How "out" do you consider yourself at home?

1 2 3 4 5 6

Not at all out ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Completely Out

11.) Would you consider yourself an activist?

Yes

No

If yes, please describe your role as an activist.

12.) Do you currently hold any leadership positions on campus?

If yes, please describe your role as a leader.

**Confirmation**

Your results have been recorded. Thank you for your participation!

## APPENDIX F – SURVEY IRB APPROVAL

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER for EXEMPT REVIEW

This is to certify that the research proposal: **Pro00047786**

Entitled: *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) "Out" Climate Survey*

Submitted by:

Principal Investigator: Leia K. Cain

College/Department: [REDACTED]

was reviewed in accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2), the referenced study received an exemption from Human Research Subject Regulations on **8/18/2015**. No further action or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. However, the Principal Investigator must inform the Office of Research Compliance of any changes in procedures involving human subjects. Changes to the current research protocol could result in a reclassification of the study and further review by the IRB.

Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, consent document(s), if applicable, are not stamped with an expiration date.

Research related records should be retained for a minimum of three (3) years after termination of the study.

The Office of Research Compliance is an administrative office that supports the [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board ([REDACTED] IRB). If you have questions, contact [REDACTED].

**APPENDIX G – SEC COMPARISON OF LGBT CAMPUS RESOURCES**

<b>Southeastern Conference Institution (SEC)</b>	<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>LGBT Office and/or Staff?</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Staff Members</b>	<b>Designated space (outside of staff office)?</b>	<b>Housed Under</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Auburn University</b>	25,469	No	N/a	None	No	Diversity and Multicultural Affairs	Gay-Straight alliance advised by Multicultural Center which has director and administrative assistant; Auburn GLB Caucus (faculty and staff) coordinate the Ally Program
<b>Louisiana State University</b>	29,718	Partially - a GA within Office of Multicultural Affairs	N/a	1 GA for Safe Space Campaign and LGBTQ Projects	No	Office of Multicultural Affairs under Vice-Provost for Equity, Diversity, and Community Outreach	Office runs Safe Space program and advises student organization; has 3 professional staff members but none focus on LGBTQ work – grad assistant is only staff member focused on the topic
<b>Mississippi State University</b>	20,424	No	N/a	None	No	Holmes Cultural Diversity Center	Holmes Center has 3 professionals, 2 support staff, and a graduate assistant, and coordinates Safe Zone program and limited LGBT programming
<b>Texas A&amp;M University</b>	50,230	Yes	2007	Coordinator and a graduate assistant	Yes – GLBT Resource Center	Dean of Student Life (and separate from Multicultural Services)	

<b>Southeastern Conference Institution (SEC)</b>	<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>LGBT Office and/or Staff?</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Staff Members</b>	<b>Designated space (outside of staff office)?</b>	<b>Housed Under</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>University of Alabama</b>	31,647	No	N/a	Graduate assistant under DOS to coordinate Safe Zone	No	Dean of Students	Capstone Alliance is an organization of faculty, staff, and graduate students which charges dues and is the primary programming arm, also has Spectrum student organization
<b>University of Arkansas</b>	23,199	No	N/a	None	No	Center for Multicultural and Diversity Education	Center is run by Diversity Affairs and has 2 professionals, 1 support staff, and 1 graduate assistant and coordinates Safe Zone program and limited LGBT programming
<b>University of Florida</b>	49,589	Yes	2004	Director and graduate assistant	Yes – Office of LGBT Affairs	Multicultural and Diversity Affairs which is under VP of Student Affairs	
<b>University of Georgia</b>	34,816	Yes	2005	Associate Director for Student Life/Director, 2 Coordinators, GA	Yes – LGBT Resource Center	Student Life under Dean of Students in Student Affairs	



<b>Southeastern Conference Institution (SEC)</b>	<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>LGBT Office and/or Staff?</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Staff Members</b>	<b>Designated space (outside of staff office)?</b>	<b>Housed Under</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>University of Kentucky</b>	27,226	Partially – space but no staff members	Unknown	None	Yes – OutSource	Office of Institutional Diversity	
<b>University of Mississippi</b>	18,224	No	N/a	None	No	Multicultural Affairs under Dean of Students	One staff member over multicultural affairs, very limited programming, advises LGBT student group, no Safe Zone program, has a Women and Gender Studies center that is more academically focused and under College of Liberal Arts
<b>University of Missouri</b>	33,762	Yes	Unknown	Full-time coordinator	Yes – LGBTQ Resource Center	Student Life in Student Affairs	
<b>University of South Carolina</b>	30,721	Partially – staff members but no space	2011	Coordinator and graduate assistant	No	Office of Multicultural Student Affairs in Student Life	
<b>University of Tennessee</b>	30,194	Yes	February 2010	Director (who is also fulltime elsewhere), and GA	Yes – OUTreach LGBT and Ally Resource Center	Vice-Chancellor for Diversity	Commission for LGBT People advises and advocates on behalf of LGBT concerns and has the GA who works in the center – commission reports to Chancellor and has existed since 2006; Safe Zone program sponsored by Dean of Students

<b>Southeastern Conference Institution (SEC)</b>	<b>Total Enrollment</b>	<b>LGBT Office and/or Staff?</b>	<b>Year Founded</b>	<b>Staff Members</b>	<b>Designated space (outside of staff office)?</b>	<b>Housed Under</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>Vanderbilt University</b>	12,836	Yes	2008	Director, 2 full-time coordinators, 2 graduate assistants and an administrativ e assistant	Yes – Office of LGBTQI Life	Dean of Students	