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INTERSECTIONALITY OF LESBIAN, GAY, AND BISEXUAL INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: IMPACT OF PERCEIVED EXPERIENCES ON CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	While there are studies that examine the experience of LGB or international students, we are not aware of any study that examines both intersectionalities. In this study, we attempt to be the first to examine the experiences of international LGB students and the resources they utilize on campuses.
Background	This research provides an understanding of how this population of students interact with the campus environment, how they perceive the campus climate, and what impact their interaction and perceptions have on their performance and overall outcomes.
Methodology	This narrative qualitative research study was guided by the unifying model of sexual identity development and the model of multiple dimensions of identity. This study conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven participants from two states to attain a deeper insight and perspective on the experiences of LGB International students.
Contribution	With this population of students being understudied in the larger body of literature, the result of this research will allow for institutional staff and future researchers to gain additional insight into the experiences and outcomes of international students that identify as a member of the LGB community.
Findings	The respondents indicated a mixture of experiences based on their sexual orientation and national identity. Emerging themes for RQ1 were Fear, Isolation, and Openness. Respondents expressed the utilization of a wide variety of resources from campus based on online resources. Emerging themes for

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	RQ2 were Campus Based Resources, Online Resources, and Negative Experiences.
Recommendations for Practitioners	Based on these findings, institutions of higher education can promote the resources available to students within these populations. Institutions should be intentional in supporting the spiritual and religious needs of international LGBTQIA students to aid in the holistic development of their students.
Recommendation for Researchers	It is recommended for researchers to explore how international students who identify as LGBTQIA students experience community colleges.
Future Research	Future research should explore how staff, administrators, and faculty attempt to support students from regions of the world that are very conservative as they recruit students from those regions.
Keywords	LGBTQIA, international students, intersectionality, student engagement

INTRODUCTION

The number of international students seeking postsecondary education within the United States has increased over the years (IIE, 2018). Transitioning to college creates challenges and stressors to various students (Lau, Garza, & Garcia, 2018). This is particularly true for international students who have to leave their country to attend a postsecondary institution in another country in a different region of the world. The term LGBTQIA is an acronym that includes individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identities (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015). LGBTQIA is a term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. It is used as an umbrella term (Garvey et al., 2015). For the purpose of this research and article, the acronym LGB will be used as an overarching term for sexual orientation to represent the disclosed identities of the participants within the study. However, at times, the acronym or term utilized in the literature will be used in order to reflect the original research cited.

While the transition can be challenging for any international student, the intersecting identities of identifying as LGB increases the challenges faced by international students. Students who hold multiple intersecting identities may potentially face more than one form of discrimination and oppression in regards to all of the identities that they hold (Harley, Nowak, Gassaway, & Savage, 2002). Therefore, individuals tend to experience different forms of marginalization when they have multiple intersecting identities, such as sex, gender, and race (Kulick, Wernick, Woodford, & Renn, 2017). While there are studies that examine the experience of LGB or international students, we are not aware of any study that examines both intersectionalities. Intersectionality is the complex process of multiple identities that may intertwine and impact an individual's experiences (Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2014). Failure to acknowledge the intersectionality of multiple identities would lead to the inaccurate reporting of an individual's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). This study will examine the intersectionality of the identities of sexual orientation and ethnicity.

In this study, we attempt to be the first to examine the experiences of international LGB students and the resources they utilize on campuses to ease their transition to college. With regard to the LGBTQIA community, individuals tend to wait to come out until they are in college (Beemyn, & Rankin, 2011). Coming to the United States potentially provides international students with the opportunity to "develop and explore in a supportive environment" that may not be available in their home country (Valosik, 2015, p. 48). The review of the literature will first explore LGB students, followed by discussing some of the current policies within the United States that may hinder protection of members of the LGBTQIA community, and conclude with recommendations for future research. With this population of students being understudied in the larger body of literature, the result of this research will allow for institutional staff and future researchers to gain additional insight into the experiences and outcomes of international students that identify as a member of the LGB community.

This research will fill a gap in the literature, focusing on the experiences of LGB International Students enrolled at a post-secondary institution in the United States. The purpose of this study was to better understand the LGB International Student experience, the US campus environment, how they perceive the campus climate, and what impact their interaction and perceptions have on their performance and overall outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

LGB STUDENTS

There is a lack of research in the overall field of LGBTQIA individuals (Lippincott, Wlazelek, & Schumacher, 2000; Hafford-Letchfield, Pezzella, Cole, & Manning, 2017). Of the available research, the populations utilized have consisted of predominately White individuals, with a lack of cultural representation.

Regarding academic success, research has suggested that faculty interaction is important (Linley et al., 2016). Students with marginalized identities have been found to perform better when there are increased faculty interactions. Additionally, research has found that students tend to seek out faculty members who share a similar national identity. Research has, however, found mixed results regarding a connection between academic success of LGBTQIA students and interactions with LGBTQIA faculty. When compared to heterosexual students, LGBTQIA students tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with faculty interactions but lower levels of satisfaction with the campus environment. LGBTQIA students are more likely to experience forms of harassment and discrimination within the campus environment than heterosexual students (Linley et al., 2016). Transgender and gender non-conforming students have reported experiencing harassment on campus at a higher rate than LGB students, 38% and 20% respectively (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2017).

Operating under the belief that within modern times, individuals are less likely to engage in overt discrimination toward marginalized groups, “some people believe they neither hold biases against other groups nor participate in discriminatory behavior; in fact, many individuals may report that discrimination (e.g., racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia) no longer exists” (Nadal, Whitman, Davis, Erazo, & Davidoff, 2016, p. 488). However, research suggests that changes in the social and political environment have led to an increase in discrimination or microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2016). A 2015 survey of 2,000 heterosexual medical students found that 47.8% of respondents reported “explicit biases” towards LGBTQIA individuals and 81.5% reported “implicit biases” toward LGBTQIA individuals (Nadal et al., 2016, p. 488). While microaggressions can take many different forms, some common examples experienced by LGBTQIA individuals include heterosexist language, belief in a collective experience, and discomfort towards LGBTQIA individuals (Nadal et al., 2016).

Impact of US laws and policies

LGBTQIA have seen progress over the years with regard to laws and policies (Teman, 2018). However, LGBTQIA individuals have continued to encounter discrimination, and there have been both societal and political efforts to challenge protections (Teman, 2018). LGBTQIA individuals have indicated being unsure of the future since the 2016 U.S. presidential election (Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Galupo, 2018). Since taking office, the Trump administration has engaged in numerous activities that could potentially threaten the rights of LGBTQIA individuals, such as arguing LGBTQIA individuals should not receive protection under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and removing protection from discrimination for LGBTQIA individuals who work for the federal government (Gonzales et al., 2018).

Citing Herek (1990), Gonzalez et al. (2018) define heterosexism as “an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behavior, identity, relationship, or community” (p. 133). Encountering heterosexism can lead to LGBTQIA experiencing minority stress. Minority stress is the context of this manuscript refers to multiple social stressors, such as prejudice,

discrimination, concealing one's sexual orientation, or homophobia, that are a result of "stigmatized social status, regardless of their uniqueness to the experience of sexual minority individuals" (Frost, Lehavot, & Meyer, 2015, p. 2). Heterosexual individuals tend to become privileged by considering themselves as normal when compared to LGBTQIA individuals. The failure to provide protection against LGBTQIA-based discrimination and harassment promotes and reinforces the notion of heterosexual privilege (Gonzales et al., 2018).

International laws and policies

In 2015, it was estimated that 2.8 billion people lived in a country where holding an identity of LGBTQIA could result in imprisonment, punishment, or death (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2015). Additionally, it was estimated that only 780 million LGBTQIA individuals live in a country where they are legally allowed to marry (HRC, 2015). While originally believed to be a medical disorder, homosexuality was removed from the list of disorders in 1973 by the American Psychiatric Association and in 1992 by the World Health Organisation (Sathyanarayana Rao & Jacob, 2012). Additionally, some countries have begun decriminalizing homosexuality and changing social norms. In India, the Delhi High Court ruled that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which classified homosexuality as a criminal offence, violated fundamental rights (*Naz Foundation v Government of NCT of Delhi and Others*, 2009; Sathyanarayana Rao & Jacob, 2012). In 2018, the Supreme Court of India unanimously ruled that Section 377 was unconstitutional (*Navej Singh Johar v Union of India Ministry of Law and Justice*, 2018). Considering Latin America, Argentina legalized gay marriage and adoption in 2010 (Corrales, 2012). In 2008, Ecuador banned discrimination "on the basis of 'gender identity,' 'sexual orientation' and 'HIV status'" (p. 90). Uruguay legalized civil unions in 2009, and El Salvador banned discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in the public service. While progress was observed, in 2012, Latin America was considered to be "home to some of the worst forms of discrimination and mistreatment of LGBT folks" (Corrales, 2012, p. 90). Within Middle Eastern countries, homosexuality is considered an "excuse for the arbitrary detention, arrest, torture, and deaths of hundreds of people" (Simmons, 2014, p. 162). Homosexuality is punishable by death in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iran (Simmons, 2014; Ungar, 2002).

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The number of international students enrolling in post-secondary institutions in the United States has increased over the years (Oba & Pope, 2013; Quach, Todd, Willis Hepp, Doneker Mancini, 2013). Between 2017 and 2018, 1,094,792 international students enrolled in a U.S. institution of higher education (Institute of International Education, 2018). In 2017, the number of international students enrolled at an institution of higher education in the U.S. increased by approximately 3% (Institute of International Education, 2018). The continuation of international students seeking out the U.S. is important for the overall benefit of society (Oba & Pope, 2013). International students "contribute to intellectual exchange between nations that is vital to building increased mutual understanding and promoting the United States" (Oba & Pope, 2013, p. 185). In addition to intellectual contributions, the Institute of International Education (2010) reported that international students had contributed nearly \$20 billion to the economy (Oba & Pope, 2013).

Moving to a new country can pose many challenges, such as stress related to adjusting to the new culture (Quach et al., 2013). The U.S. can often present a different or opposing culture to what some international students have experienced (Quach et al., 2013). Within the U.S., international students may face a series of stressors including cultural difference, discrimination, language barriers, and academic and financial problems (Oba & Pope, 2013). Previous research has suggested that international students experience a higher level of stress than domestic students. With international students being reported to be experiencing higher levels of stress, factoring in the intersecting identity of LGBTQIA, the level of stress could potentially increase.

While it is unknown how many LGBTQIA international students are enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education, it is believed that “LGBT international students face unique issues in the United States including developing their sexual identity, having questions related to coming out, forming intimate relationships, and coping with health-related problems” (Oba & Pope, 2013, p. 186). While the LGBTQIA related stressors experienced by international students are often similar to those of domestic students, international students tend to be less likely to have a social network or support system they can utilize as they navigate their sexual or gender identity. Oftentimes, LGBTQIA international students come from countries where homosexuality is illegal or not accepted. As a result, LGBTQIA international students face the challenge of returning back to their home country where they may potentially be forced to hide part of their identity (Oba & Pope, 2013).

The time period of when traditional college students enroll, between late adolescence to early adulthood, is considered to be an important time for identity development (Quach et al., 2013). LGBTQIA international students may experience an additional challenge when exploring their identity in a new culture (Quach et al., 2013). Within Chinese and Japanese cultures, there has been found to be a strict expectation that individuals will follow traditional family roles (Lippincott et al., 2000). Therefore, LGBTQIA individuals tend to not be accepted due to same-sex relationships being viewed as “a threat to the endurance of the family and a spurning of the individual’s cultural roles” (Lippincott et al., 2000, p. 1054). However, within the Philippines culture, there is a higher level of acceptance towards LGBTQIA individuals (Lippincott et al., 2000).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Student populations within higher education have varying experiences. Looking specifically at international students that identify as a member of the LGB community, multiple theoretical frameworks can be utilized to learn more about their interactions with a campus environment and experiences. The Unifying Model of Sexual Identity Development and the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity are the two theoretical models guiding this study.

UNIFYING MODEL OF SEXUAL IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

The Unifying Model of Sexual Identity Development suggests LGBTQIA individuals navigate their identity development through two parallel elements of development: individual sexual identity development and social identity process (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011). Sexual identity development is considered to be the process that an individual navigates as they determine their sexual orientation. Sexual identity development consists of five stages: compulsory heterosexuality, active exploration, diffusion, deepening and commitment, and synthesis. Compulsory heterosexuality refers to the societal notion that heterosexuality is normal and the default sexual orientation. Any individual who adheres to and follows this social and cultural norm who fall within the first stage, compulsory heterosexuality. Within this stage, individuals are more likely to hold biases and to discriminate against individuals holding sexual minority identities. Transitioning from this stage is considered permanent as it consists of the development of one’s understanding of sexuality and identity. The second stage, active exploration, is the “purposeful exploration, evaluation, or experimentation of one’s sexual needs, values orientation and/or preferences for activities, partner characteristics, or modes of sexual expression” (Dillon et al., 2011, p. 660). While this stage must be purposeful and intentional, an individual can engage in active exploration through their behavioral actions or cognitively by thinking. The methods or means an individual uses to engage in active exploration may vary depending on the individual environment. The third stage, diffusion, is an alternative stage an individual may enter and runs parallel to active exploration. However, as identity development progresses, this stage may be skipped. Diffusion is the “absence of commitment and of systematic exploration” (Dillon et al., 2011, p. 662). Diffusion is broken into two forms: “diffused diffusion” and “care-free diffusion”. Individuals within diffused diffusion tend to experience stress from not having strong commitments. However, individuals within carefree diffusion do not experience stress from the lack

of commitments. The fourth stage, deepening and commitment, involves individuals utilizing their experiences during their active exploration and increasing their commitment to their identity. Within the deepening and commitment stage, individuals are more likely to question the societal norm of compulsory heterosexuality. The final stage, synthesis, individuals begin to align their identity and beliefs with their attitudes and behaviors. While transitioning out of the compulsory heterosexuality stage is permanent, individuals can move back and forth between active exploration and synthesis over time as they continue to develop their identity (Dillon et al., 2011).

MODEL OF MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY

The Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity presents identity as fluid and ongoing experience (Jones & McEwen, 2000). An individual may experience multiple intersecting identities without necessarily displaying or presenting all of the identities they may hold. At the center is an individual's personal identity. This "core identity" is often referred to as an individual's "inner identity" due to it not being visible to others (p. 408). The "outside identities" that surround and make up an individual's core identity consists of each identity that an individual may hold (p. 408). The core identity can be made up of many different and intersecting identities, including gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and class (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

Utilizing the theoretical lenses of The Unifying Model of Sexual Identity Development and the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, the narrative qualitative study was conducted to better understand the LGB International Student experience, the US campus environment, how they perceive the campus climate, and what impact their interaction and perceptions have on their performance and overall outcomes. This study focused on two research questions:

1. What are the experiences of LGB International Students on college campuses in the United States?
2. How do LGB International Students describe the impact student services have on their on-campus experiences?

METHODS

This qualitative research study was guided by the Unifying Model of Sexual Identity Development (Dillon et al., 2011) and the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000). This study utilized a narrative approach with semi-structured in-person interviews with participants to attain a deeper insight and perspective on the experiences of LGB International students. A narrative approach was selected as it examines "the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives" (Creswell, 2014, p. 13). Purposeful sampling procedures were utilized throughout. "The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites [...] that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research questions" (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). The research team shared a weekly call for participants through their institution's announcement listserv. Additional call for participant announcements were emailed to international center directors at all public institutions in the state of Texas and through the national research email listserv with the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals.

Developing the interview protocol, a series of questions were crafted, aligning with the research questions and the theoretical perspectives guiding the study. Two members of the research team, one faculty member in higher education and one faculty member in counselor education, reviewed the questions for clarity and appropriateness to the topic and related field. A second round of review was conducted by international graduate students within the respective fields. The international students reviewed the questions to ensure the wording of questions were translatable to other cultures. The interview protocol was adjusted based on feedback received.

Criteria for inclusion in the study were international student enrolled at a public postsecondary institution in the United States and holding an identity as a member of the LGB community. Interested

participants completed an online screening form through Qualtrics. Those who met the criteria to be included in the study were asked to opt-in to participate in a 60-minute interview. Participants were contacted to schedule an interview and were given an option of a face-to-face interview or an interview through the institution's Skype video conferencing system. All interviews were recorded for accuracy and transcribed. Following the completion of transcription, another member of the research team reviewed each transcript and compared it to the audio recording for accuracy. Member checking was then conducted by emailing a copy of the transcript to participants to review. Each participant was given a two-week period to review their transcript and provide any feedback. Following the completion of all stages for checking transcript accuracy, all identifying information and audio recording were destroyed in compliance with institution and federal research regulations.

Ten participants from two states self-identified to researchers, agreeing to an interview. Participants self-identified as international students studying in the U.S. from three regions: South, Southeast, and Southwest Asia (5), Europe (2), and Latin America (3). Of the ten participants, five self-identified as female and five as male. In many countries, homosexuality is not legal or is not supported (Corrales, 2012; HRC, 2015; Simmons, 2014; Ungar, 2002). As an added effort to protect the identity and safety of the participants in this study, the individual countries will not be revealed. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the participant demographics.

Table 1. Select descriptive statistics for all participants

Participant	Region	Gender	Sexual Orientation
Bridgette	Europe	Female	Lesbian
Evelynn	Southeast Asia	Female	Bisexual
Jeremiah	Latin America	Male	Gay
Karla	Southeast Asia	Female	Bisexual
Madison	Southwest Asia	Female	Bisexual
Marcelo	Latin America	Male	Bisexual
Parker	South Asia	Male	Bisexual
Santiago	Latin America	Male	Gay
Vincent	Europe	Male	Gay
Zelda	Southwest Asia	Female	Bisexual

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted for approximately 60 minutes. All interviews followed an outlined interview protocol that consisted of thirteen questions and seventeen written demographic questions. Prior to the start of the interview, the participant was asked to select a pseudonym to be used. The lead researcher was present at all interviews. A second member of the research team, with a focus in counseling, attended the interviews, asking follow-up questions, taking notes, and observing the participant.

The research team individually reviewed the transcripts and developed codes based on the theories. They then met and discussed the identified codes, collapsing similar codes and removing those that did not receive a group consensus. The transcripts were then individually coded using the NVivo coding software. Coding was completed based on the previously established codebook. Coding was conducted in a three-step process established by Strauss and Corbin (1998). First, open coding was completed to establish categories. Second, through axial coding, categories were combined, and sub-categories were established. The third step involved selective coding through the development of themes. Following the completion of coding, an inter-rater reliability report was run in NVivo. The coding team met and discussed any codes that had an inter-rater reliability report under 97%. Communication between the research team and refinement of the codes continued until no new codes emerged. Based on the coding, a list of common themes was developed.

FINDINGS

Utilizing the theoretical lenses of The Unifying Model of Sexual Identity Development and the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity, this qualitative study was conducted to better understand how LGB international students interact with their campus environment, how they perceive the campus climate, and what impact their interaction and perceptions have on their performance and overall outcomes.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1: WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF LGB INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES IN THE UNITED STATES?

The first research question focused on the experiences of LGB international students based on their intersecting identities. The respondents indicated a mixture of experiences based on their sexual orientation and national identity. Three emerging themes that appeared were Fear, Isolation, and Openness. The researchers defined the themes as follows: (i) fear is the concern for safety or the thought of needing to behave in a certain manner to avoid potential discrimination or backlash; (ii) isolation is the feeling of being alone, not being included within a group, or the feeling that one cannot actively participate; and (iii) openness is the need for an individual to come out to friends or family on multiple occasions to express sexual orientation.

Fear

Respondents expressed experiencing a form of discrimination or fear for their safety within the United States as a result of their national identity and/or their sexual orientation. Zelda stated:

I feel, like, not safe in my apartment, like, between my neighbors. Because, they might know that I'm from [Southwest Asia], I talk to the neighbors, whatever, and also, I dated someone, so they might notice that I'm, like, not straight. So, many times, I feel, like, maybe something will happen. Yeah. So, I think outside the campus is much more.

Madison discussed the need to be careful and hide her identity at times from other students to present her sexual identity being discovered back home. She expressed her concerns, stating:

I'm scared someone will completely criticize me or somehow, they will, I don't know. I don't know why I have this weird fear that they would blackmail me with this even though I don't really care if people know, but it's kind of like that. So, it's definitely impacted me in a negative way I would say.

Madison explained how identifying as bisexual increased her concerns for safety when she was interacting off-campus, saying "I would say it definitely comes out as a safety factor or, in a way, because when I go out because you, God forbid, say that to somebody it's automatically taken as a sexual invitation." She further discussed her experiences off-campus after disclosing she was bisexual to an individual, stating:

So, it kind of turns to the point where if you have somebody who kind of um clingy I guess or clingy or just kind of um you know weird, they will probably try to approach you six seven hundred times because now the thing okay this is this is like a hook-up gold right there just you know we've got to kind of approach that and find that so I think it's I'm not more of a safety issue it could become one but now I don't, I don't feel particularly like I would [put] my safety in danger.

Santiago explained that he preferred to "feel safe before telling anybody" about his sexuality. He further expressed that he "prefer[s] to be more cautious about that because it's, like I said, it's a different culture. So, you have to handle yourself differently than when I was back home."

Karla mentioned her concern with disclosing her sexual orientation to other girls in her sorority. While she did not fear for her safety, she feared that they would judge and avoid her.

I feel like if the girls, if they know my sexual orientation, especially like with straight girls, if they are from here, like they won't go against it but somehow, they will keep a distance with me because they know I like girls. And so, they will, like, keep, somehow, like, a distance with me and I just don't think it's gonna be like a good thing for my social or when people just like keep a certain distant with you just because of your sexual orientation.

Similarly, Bridgette discussed a recent trip she took with her university's campus ministry. She explained "there are like th[ese] little nuisance[s] about umm that's wrong" and how she did not feel comfortable disclosing her sexual orientation, stating "I wouldn't necessarily tell them that I'm gay because they would then act weird towards me afterwards."

Respondents expressed a feeling of fear or concern for their safety as a result of their sexual orientation and/or their national identity. Participants discussed experiencing separate instances of discrimination or harassment as a result of their sexual orientation and as a result of their national identity. However, discrimination or harassment was not a common occurrence due to the intersection of the participant's sexual orientation and national identity. These findings support the literature (Linley et al., 2016; Nadal et al., 2016; Teman, 2018) that LGBTQIA students are more likely to experience harassment and discrimination when compared to heterosexual students. While respondents explained they do not live in a constant state of fear, safety is something they must keep on the back of their mind, assessing their environment and considering their appearance and actions in order to ensure they remain safe. However, most instances of concern were reported to happen off-campus and when they were interacting with individuals who were not associated with their university.

Isolation

In addition to avoiding expressing their sexual orientation around others with the same national identity within the United States, respondents from countries where the predominant religion is Muslim expressed a need to not disclose or act on their sexual orientation in their home country. Zelda explained that "it's just a feeling of being alone, or alienated, or being a minority." Additionally, a concern shared among respondents was the need to avoid engaging in any activities in the United States that could out them and lead to individuals in their home country learning about their sexual orientation due to being required to return to their home country upon graduation. Madison's concerns regarding fear of blackmail and potential negative exposure of her sexuality to family back in her home country hindered her ability to interact with members of her community on campus. Evelyn and Marcelo expressed a different feeling of isolation, explaining they did not know any other LGBTQIA international students. Evelyn stated "Well, personally, I don't really know any other international students who are LGBT" and Marcelo explained:

Because, I don't know, I would say, I don't know, to be honest, I don't really know. But as international student, I feel, like, I didn't really get a chance to speak, like, really hang out with other people from the LGBTQ community.

While respondents reported moving to the United States from various regions from around the world, similarities could be seen regarding feelings of isolation. Some respondents from regions where homosexuality is illegal or not accepted reported feelings of isolation due to not wanting others to learn about their sexual orientation or fears of "blackmail." However, others explained that their feelings of isolation stemmed from not being aware of other LGBTQIA international students they could relate with. While this feeling of isolation did not come from being shut out from others, it appeared as a result of not being able to establish a safe sense of community where they could interact with others with similar identities.

Openness

Vincent and Bridgette, both from European countries, expressed different experiences from other regions. Both Vincent and Bridgette described how they have felt welcomed by everyone they have encountered in the United States. Additionally, both mentioned that they do not feel a need to hide their sexual orientation. Vincent stated:

[...] I don't feel like me being international or being gay is, like, prevent me from anything umm even say that me being [European], me being like foreigner around here makes other students maybe more curious or, like, more, like, willing to get to know me and ask questions rather than being, like, I don't know wary or something, if that makes sense.

Respondents from Latin America expressed a variety of experiences based on their sexual orientation. Discussing his experience with moving to the United States and navigating his identity as a gay male, Jeremiah stated:

When I came here, I kind of closeted myself a little. I was just not aware about how it was. I knew [Southern State] was a conservative state. [City in Southern State] was very conservative. And I just didn't feel very comfortable, so I just went slow with that, I kind of regressed a little bit I think, but it was good so I could learn more and observe a little bit better. But, in the end of my freshman year, I was, like, I need to be true with who I am, so I call my mom and then I told her that I was gay.

Santiago explained how he used to be more open but has since decreased his level of openness since moving to the United States. However, he explained that as he has learned more about the culture and felt more comfortable, he has begun being more open about his identity, stating:

Yeah, well I tried to be more. Yeah well maybe not so much as open as I was in my hometown or in [Latin America] because I'm starting to just get to know how other people handle it here, you know, is a different way. And I just so it's not that I really don't want to say it, but it's not doesn't seem like an important information I will have to share with everybody. So, I'm just doesn't present myself as LGBTQ student or reveal my identity. You know, whether at first.

However, Zelda explained that when she was around students from her home country, she presented herself differently in order to hide her identity. She stated "And I have to then pretend, like, I'm different. I have to, I really, whenever I go to, like, something, with like [Southwest Asians], I wear more makeup." On the contrary, Evelyn explained that she felt comfortable being open with her friends even though homosexuality was not accepted in her home country. She explained:

Well, like I said, I was like pretty out. So, like the sexuality thing really wasn't an issue for me. Like ever, [laughter] you know, after I came out because like I realized after I came out and like my good friends, I really don't care what other people think. So, like, I stopped caring about that. So, after I came here, I'm like, eh, whatever.

Discussing their experiences with being open about their sexual orientation, respondents expressed different feelings based on what region they were from. The two respondents from European countries both discussed being open about their sexual orientation, both back home and within the United States. However, other respondents had mixed experiences. Some explained they could not be open due to homosexuality being illegal or not accepted in their home country. Others discussed being unsure of whether they could be open due to the political climate or level of perceived conservatism of the area in which they were living. However, respondents expressed being able to become more open about their sexual orientation over time as they became more comfortable with their environment.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW DO LGB INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DESCRIBE THE IMPACT STUDENT SERVICES HAVE ON THEIR ON-CAMPUS EXPERIENCES?

The second research question focused on how resources can impact the experiences of LGB international students based on their intersecting identities. Respondents expressed the utilization of a wide variety of resources from campus based on online resources. However, not all experiences were positive. Three emerging themes appeared were Campus Based Resources, Online Resources, and Negative Experiences. The researchers defined the themes as follows: (i) campus based resources are those resources that are funded by and provided to students by their post-secondary institution; (ii) online resources are resources that are publicly available on the internet and accessed through a computer or smart phone; and (iii) negative experiences include experiences that were negative in nature when engaging with either campus resources or online resources.

Campus Based Resources

Respondents discussed a variety of resources they utilized to enhance their experiences based on their identities. The resources ranged from the institutions' international student center and LGBTQIA office to student organizations.

Marcelo explained his preference for campus resources that promote safe sex, stating "they are known for giving free condoms and free kind of like sex ed and training for LGBT." Parker mentioned utilizing the same campus resource, stating "there's free condoms there and there's free STD tests." Parker explained that through access to campus-based resources that promote safe-sex he felt he had the ability to engage with others in a safe manner. He explained:

Braver in a sense. I mean, when you don't have enough resources, like, say when you have to buy so many condoms if you are actually proactive, then you really tend to be less active when you have to buy so many condoms, but when you have many freedom so you know you just go crazy and then you're just you you're like okay let's just have fun you know sometimes it happens.

Respondents reported having access to and being involved in student organizations based on their identities was beneficial. Jeremiah explained his experience, stating:

I really liked being part of the GSA [Gender and Sexuality Association/Gay Straight Alliance], it was a little bit of it of a push for me in the beginning of my freshman year, I joined and was really shy but then eventually I started coming out more and sharing more information.

Zelda discussed the benefits, stating:

[...] in terms of being from [Southwest Asia], there is an [...] Student Association. So, this is a good resource because if something happens, many times they support me or they all share the same problems and do something as a community.

Additionally, she discussed being a member of GSA, saying "GSA is definitely like being LGBT, so that makes me a member."

Santiago described how having access to an LGBTQIA office and organization was a new experience for him, stating:

On campus, I saw the sign for the LGBT group. I never been to that, we never had that kind of group back in my hometown. So, it will be, like, a new experience for me to, maybe, get close to them or meet them.

In addition to LGBTQIA resources, respondents discussed utilizing the International Student Center (ICC). Parker stated:

I do utilize the ICC for professional uses, like, you know, like, I had to apply for employment card now so I use the ICC and few more stuff for Social Security, getting registered there so I use the ICC there but I mean on those basis I so apart from that I haven't used ICC at all.

Jeremiah explained:

The ICC provides a lot of things for international students and there are a lot of other multicultural organizations that I feel that maybe if they could be better would be to advertise more about it and be more vocal but I think diversity week does a good thing.

Campus based resources were found to be beneficial by respondents. Respondents explained they utilized the International Student Center and programs based on their international status. Additionally, respondents expressed benefiting from having access to safe-sex programs, GSA, and a campus LGBTQIA office and staff. Through having access to these resources, respondents were able to obtain safe-sex materials, such as condoms and STI (Sexually Transmitted Infection) testing, and meet others with similar identities.

Online Resources

Utilizing online resources was a commonality among respondents. Marcelo discussed attempting to build connections by "talking to more people through Grindr." However, he explained that "a lot of the guys on Grindr are looking for sex, basically or just don't want to continue on with the conversation."

The use of online resources ranged from social media such as Facebook to online dating app such as Grindr or Tinder. Parker explained that he utilized social media and online dating apps to experiment with others, "just hanging out and sexual." He explained:

It used to be online, but now when it's with someone, we would go through tinder or something like that, through social media. And, like, I mean, tinder and social media, I don't know. But, yeah, it's basically through that.

Additionally, Parker explained that he used a pseudo-Facebook account to explore his sexual orientation in his home country, explaining "I had that pseudo Facebook account just for that." He discussed "Since it's illegal, I wasn't open about it and whenever I wanted to interact I used to have a different social media account to interact with the community."

Zelda discussed using the internet and social media to learn more and to answer questions. She explained: "I use the internet, I might Google or read some articles." Additionally, she discussed using online dating apps, stating "I dated someone from here, and I also was in this dating apps, and I sometimes felt bad because people, I could, I might see someone and then see them at Starbucks." Zelda discussed her use of online resources, stating:

[...] if I have a question, I just post it online. So, virtual connection. So, I'm kind of not involved personally with any of them. Through the internet I use the [...] Student] Association more because, yeah, I asked questions about the Visa or whatever.

The use of online resources played multiple roles. First, they provided the ability to learn more or to quickly locate information. The resources, such as Grindr or Tinder, provided respondents with the ability to date and meet others without having to go out and meet in public. In situations such as Parker's, utilizing online resources provided the opportunity to meet others with similar identities while also concealing his identity in the public environment.

Negative encounters

However, not every respondent reported positive interactions when attempting to utilize student organizations as a resource. Marcelo stated:

I tried to go to the meetings on for GSA, but the very first one I didn't get the best impression at all, like, just one of them were very friendly and move the chair for me and I was, like, that's very nice from him, but then, like, I play a few games with them but none of them are really, like, wanted to get to know each other, so I felt, like, even though I went to a gay-straight Alliance meeting, I didn't really get out at all, like, I didn't really get to know anyone or, like, or feel accepted.

Additionally, Zelda expressed concerns with participating in GSA due to her national identity, explaining:

I don't want to be out to most of the people I know. So, this might be a reason why I'm not very participating in GSA. What Else. Yeah, I definitely think between the GSA community and me as an [Southwest Asian] student, it would be something like, interesting or whatever. They might ask many questions.

While not all experiences with resources were negative, some respondents expressed having negative experiences. Conflicts between national identity and sexual orientation played a factor for some, such as Zelda, who explained that while she wanted to participate in GSA, she feared that she might be seen by other students from her home country. Other respondents discussed not feeling welcome when participating in GSA events. Respondents reported not feeling welcome as a result of their national identity and/or not being part of established cliques. By having negative experiences, respondents were less likely to participate in the future and then felt isolated later on as a result of not having an established community.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

International students play an important role on postsecondary campuses across the globe. That is particularly true within the United States as they bring global perspectives in environments that tend to be very US-centric. In this study, we have attempted to better understand the experiences of international students who identify as LGB in postsecondary institutions in the US and the impact student services have on those experiences.

The experiences of our respondents varied depending on the region of the world they were from. Overall, respondents from European countries expressed more positive experiences with regard to their sexual orientation and their national identity. While not exploring sexual orientation, this mirrors findings by Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado, and Rhoades (2006) who found that international students that came from European countries had better experiences than students from non-European countries. Respondents explained that while there was a concern about safety as a result of national identity, the majority of negative experiences and isolation was a result of homosexuality not being accepted in their home region and attempting to hide their identity from friends and other students from their home region. Other respondents expressed having concerns initially when they moved to the US. Over time, they felt they could be more open about the identities they held. Overall, feelings of fear and concerns for safety existed as a result of the respondents' sexual orientation and/or national identity. Respondents also reported feelings of isolation as a result of their sexual orientation or because they were not aware of other LGTBQIA international students they could associate with. Based on these findings, institutions of higher education can promote the resources, such as international culture centers, LGTBQIA centers, Gender and Sexuality Associations, identity-based student organizations, diversity department and programs that are available to students within these populations. Developing a safe environment for LGB international students to come to together and interact without fear or potential implication of being outed to other international students who are not LGB would provide these students with the ability to establish a sense of community with students who hold similar identities.

Respondents expressed utilizing various resources on their college campuses. These resources included campus-based resources such as safe-sex programs, GSA, and LGTBQIA offices and online re-

sources such as Facebook, Grindr, or Tinder. The utilization of these resources enabled respondents to better engage with their environment. However, in some instances, respondents expressed negative experiences that led them to not fully participate or engage with some resources. These negative experiences included instances of not feeling accepted or able to participate due to their national identity or because they were not part of cliques that had formed among group members. These experiences impacted their level of engagement and feelings of inclusion. Prior literature suggests that many U.S. based institutions lack the resources to cater to foreign students (García & Villarreal, 2014; Kher, Juneau, & Molstad, 2003; Lee et al., 2006). So, while there are resources on campus, many of these resources are limited, or they may not provide a safe environment for them to participate in.

Our findings suggest that social media plays an important role in our participants' exploring their sexuality. As several indicated, utilizing a pseudo profile on Facebook or other social media and dating applications allowed for anonymity to prevent their identity from being discovered within their home region. Participants also discussed utilizing social media and dating apps to explore their sexuality within the US. Through the use of social media and dating apps, participants reported strengthening their understanding of and comfort in their sexual identity, which would suggest that students are achieving synthesis. Based on these findings, institutions of higher education can promote the use of social media among this population of students or any marginalized populations to provide a vehicle for anonymity while still exploring their identities. Institutions of higher education should educate students on the safe use of social media and dating apps to ensure students are engaging with the online environment in a safe manner and in a way that allows for them to appropriately develop their identities. While institutions cannot monitor the use of social media and dating apps by their students, they can provide students with the knowledge and resources needed to ensure students are utilizing the resources in an effective manner that promotes safe and effective exploration of their identity.

Several respondents expressed conflict between being religious or spiritual and having an LGB identity. Multiple participants encountered homophobic or antigay sermons when attempting to engage their religious identity. Other participants expressed feeling uneasy or uncertain about attending religious groups or campus clubs due to the perception of potential homophobic messages. As a result, participants encountered difficulties attempting to connect their intersecting identities as a religious or spiritual individual and an individual that holds an LGB identity. Institutions of higher education should be intentional in supporting the spiritual and religious needs of international LGBTQIA students to aid in the holistic development of their students. Non-denominational and welcoming spaces should be made available to students who wish to establish or connect with a religious or spiritual community on campus. However, institutions of higher education must ensure that these spaces remain welcoming and supportive of all students and belief systems.

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations in this study that should be taken into account. First, based on the sensitivity of the issues surrounding LGB identity, there were international students who did not participate in the study due to the potential of being identified. Thus, we could not obtain a representation of all regions of the world. For example, we have no one from an African nation, Australia, or North America (Canada or Mexico). Second, the fact that data come from only three institutions in two states that are historically conservative is a limitation to this study. Thus, the experience of our participants may not reflect the experiences of LGB students in more progressive areas for the United States. Our call for participants included all individuals who held an identity within the LGBTQIA community. However, we only interviewed participants with an identity of lesbian, gay, or bisexual. As such, this is a limitation because the voices of all other identities within the community are not included in this study. These findings cannot be used to make assumptions about the experiences of LGBTQIA international students as a whole when only a portion of these identities was included. A final limita-

tion is that only one participant identified as a lesbian while the other nine identified as either gay or bisexual. This is important in that our bisexual participants could date opposite sex individuals and be perceived as passing as a heterosexual individual within a heteronormative society, changing their perceptions and experiences when in opposite sex relationships.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should explore how international students who identify as LGBTQIA students experience community colleges as the number of international students matriculating at two-year institutions is growing. While our research did include one community college, future research must be more intentional in exploring experiences of LGBTQIA international students within this institutional type. In addition, future research on transgender students can excavate how this community experiences institutional climates within four- and two-campus. While there is scant research around LGB international students, there is less known of the experiences of transgender international students on US campuses. Thirdly, future studies should explore the spiritual and religious environments and how institutions can better support students and build connections and partnerships with religious leaders and organizations to support LGBTQIA international students. Finally, future research should explore how staff, administrators, and faculty attempt to support students from regions of the world that are very conservative (Middle-Eastern countries, for example) as they recruit students from those regions. We know very little of the ways in which campuses support the LGBTQIA identity development who may be reluctant to disclose their identity.

CONCLUSION

With the rise of international students globally, colleges and universities must be prepared to support international students who identify as members of the LGB community. Our findings suggest that it is important to support this population of students as they transition from their home countries to host countries by providing services and opportunities to protect their identities from their home regions while at the same time allowing them to express themselves in safe spaces within campus and the community such as GSA, LGBTQIA offices, and religious organizations. By ameliorating students' fears and isolation and moving them towards openness by supporting students' use of online and on-campus resources can promote positive outcomes of this vulnerable population. Through positive engagement and the establishment of a sense of community, students will better be able to develop their multiple intersecting identities.

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