

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ  
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of  
The School of Education in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education

University of Pittsburgh

2016

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2016

This doctoral dissertation aimed to explore the unique experiences of a very specific, yet quite diverse segment of the student body population in higher education: International students who also identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ). The experiences of this subset of the student population have not been extensively examined in scholarly research (Rankin, 2006). Oba and Pope (2013) indicate that these students might confront many difficulties in their academic and personal lives on American campuses as they grapple with factors related to their multiple identities. In light of these findings, this dissertation strove to explore the experiences of these students on one college campus in a city in the United States, the University of Pittsburgh. Sixty-nine students completed a survey which was created specifically for this study. Thirteen of the survey respondents also participated in individual interviews. Results indicated that students' experiences were quite varied whereby some students reported more positive experiences than others. Furthermore, many participants indicated that they were not open about their LGBTQ identities to others on campus. Negative encounters with homophobia and racism were also reported by various participants. Recommendations are presented for higher education professionals regarding implementing services to assist this diverse student population with a myriad of potential difficulties in their new surroundings.

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## **PREFACE**

Please note that some of the scholarly research pertaining to the topic under scrutiny uses the acronym Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA) in order to encompass a broader spectrum of individuals (Rankin, 2006). The present document will predominantly use the acronyms LGBT or LGBTQ due to their higher prevalence in scholarly research. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that this highly diverse community also includes those who identify as queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to sincerely thank Genevieve Cook, Shawntia Key, and Alexander McCarthy for their immeasurable assistance in the dissemination of surveys for this study. Without their much appreciated assistance, this dissertation would not have been possible.

I would also like to profusely thank my faculty committee members for their expertise, direction, and support. Furthermore, I would like to express my appreciation for the enduring guidance and encouragement I have received from my faculty advisor, Dr. Jacob. I was very fortunate to work with a team of highly-esteemed committee members.

Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous participants of this dissertation who bravely chose to contribute to the findings of this study. It is hoped that your participation will contribute to positive changes for your lives and for future students from every nation and of every sexual identity and gender identity.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The United States is certainly at a turning point in history regarding the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ) citizens. The landmark Supreme Court case in June of 2015 legalizing same-sex marriage as a fundamental right was a momentous occasion for the advancement of equality in this nation (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). Although this profound advance has been made, LGBTQ individuals in many states continue to fight for their rights. For example, 32 states fail to have fully-inclusive protections against discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity regarding issues related to employment, housing, federal funding, credit, and students in education (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). In fact, in the state where this dissertation study takes place, Pennsylvania, it is currently legal to discriminate in employment and housing practices based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Furthermore, Pennsylvania does not have laws regarding hate-crimes or anti-bullying. The state in question also does not have any laws that protect students in schools from discrimination (Human Rights Campaign, 2016). It is clear that the legal and cultural struggles regarding sexual orientation and gender identity continue to be at the forefront of the culture wars of this nation. These socio-cultural wars are also being waged, often on an even more dangerous scale, in many other nations across the globe.

As these culture wars are fought, the world is becoming more interconnected culturally, financially, and academically. In terms of academic exchange of knowledge, the importance of the

growth of enrollment of international students in undergraduate and graduate programs within institutions of higher education in the United States cannot be ignored. In the 2014–2015 academic year, the number of international students enrolled at colleges and universities in the United States increased 10% to a record high of 974,926 students (Institute of International Education, 2015). In fact, approximately 4.8% of the nation’s higher education students are international (Institute of International Education, 2015). As these numbers are predicted to continue to grow, the impact of this influx of people and ideas might immeasurably change the state of higher education in this nation.

The present dissertation aims to explore the experiences of a particular subset of students in the United States who might be overlooked or even invisible: LGBTQ international students. According to Rankin (2006), there has been a lack of research focusing on the experiences of international students in higher education who also identify as LGBT. Furthermore, Renn (2010) indicates that the unique experiences of this student population have not been extensively examined by scholars and researchers. Renn argues that LGBT issues pertaining to globalization and internationalism in higher education have been largely unrecognized in the current body of research. Renn also maintains that research regarding international issues and LGBT topics might be used to improve policy, curricula, and programs in higher education in the United States and throughout the world. In light of the previously presented assertions, this dissertation strives to add to the body of knowledge regarding the experiences of this segment of the international student population in this nation. The study strives to examine their potential difficulties as well as their possible achievements in their new surroundings. Furthermore, it will analyze what might have appealed to certain individuals regarding why they decided to study at an American institution.

## 1.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question of this study is, “How would international students who are also LGBTQ describe their experiences on this campus?” This question would entail determining positive, negative, and perhaps neutral experiences at the institution. As the 2010 Campus Pride survey found, LGBT students continue to report higher levels of harassment and discrimination on campus in relation to their heterosexual peers (Rankin et al., 2010). It was hypothesized that the international LGBTQ students participating in the present study might also report higher levels of harassment and discrimination. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that the participants in this study might report that these negative consequences of their LGBTQ identity might be compounded by their categorization as an international student. It was also hypothesized that the University of Pittsburgh might not have adequate services and resources to accommodate the potential difficulties of being an international student in a foreign country along with the difficulties of adjusting to a culture that continues to marginalize LGBTQ individuals to some extent.

Literature from a variety of disciplinary bases will be utilized in order to frame this study. It is clear that the primary discipline from which information will be reviewed will be higher education. Numerous studies in higher education research have aimed to explore the experiences of LGBT students and their specific needs and concerns (Fine, 2012; Rankin et al., 2010; Renn, 2010; Sanlo, 2004). Furthermore, literature and research from the disciplinary bases of psychology and sociology can also assist in framing this research study as these fields have focused extensively on LGBT psychological and social development (Pope et al., 2007; Troiden, 1988; Westefeld et al., 2001). Finally, research and knowledge from the relatively newer field of LGBT studies can also be used to create a comprehensive body of knowledge to base this study on (Wright & McKinley, 2011; Quach et al., 2013).

After reviewing the literature and conceptualizing the goals of this study, it was determined that six main factors will be analyzed in order to thoroughly examine the experiences of these students. These primary study factors include: (1) the academic demographics of the participants, (2) the personal demographics of the participants, (3) how satisfied students were with their overall academic experience, (4) their assessment of the campus climate for LGBTQ international students, (5) how open they were regarding their identities, and (6) their knowledge of health and relationship issues. Both the survey and interview components of this study strove to gather data regarding these six primary factors. In addition, the interview segment of the study also contained questions pertaining to understanding the off-campus experiences of the participants in the city of Pittsburgh as well as the nation in general.

## **1.2 INQUIRY STRATEGY**

The present document exhibits current scholarly literature and research regarding LGBTQ international students. This information was utilized during the creation of surveys which were employed to gather data from this segment of the student population at the University of Pittsburgh. This university is a large, urban Research I institution in the northeastern section of the United States. Two pilot surveys were disseminated in order to ascertain whether the present dissertation study was warranted. The first pilot survey was disseminated to LGBTQ international students during the summer of 2014 in order to learn about their unique experiences at the university and to ascertain whether a larger study would be necessary and possible. These results are briefly analyzed in Chapter 3 of this document and implications for further research regarding this topic

are also exhibited. The second pilot survey was disseminated in the spring of 2015 and results are also presented in Chapter 3 of this document.

The present study utilized a mixed methods approach to gathering information as both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered during dissertation proceedings through an online survey and face-to-face interviews. According to Mertens (2010), a mixed-methods approach can often lead to results that exhibit more breadth and depth regarding the issue that is being analyzed due to the presence of results that can be quantified and qualified. Mertens maintains that a mixed methods approach can be particularly effective because it can answer both how often an event occurs (quantitative) and how the event affects the participant (qualitative).

The dissertation survey provided a section for participants to voluntarily provide contact information for a potential follow-up interview. The procedural details for the follow-up interviews are presented in Chapter 3 of this document. According to Mertens, phenomenological research is a category of qualitative research that aims to seek out individual's perceptions and meanings of a phenomenon or experience. Mertens indicates that the intent of phenomenological research is to understand and describe events from the subjective point of view of the participant. Therefore, the interview segment of this study utilized a phenomenological approach in order to scrutinize the experiences of LGBTQ international students on campus.

Mertens maintains that a transformative paradigm is a mode of guiding research whereby researchers consciously and explicitly position themselves side-by-side with the less powerful in society in a joint effort to bring about social transformation. The present study will be based on the transformative paradigm as it will aspire to record and present the experiences of individuals who may experience marginalization, discrimination, and harassment. Furthermore, Mertens indicates that research that is both transformative and mixed methods in nature can be particularly

effective when conducting research that strives to place a priority on social justice and the furtherance of the rights of individuals who are or may be marginalized. In summary, this dissertation offers a mixed methods approach based on the transformative paradigm and tenets of phenomenological research.

### **1.2.1 Intended audience for the study**

A wide array of individuals may be considered to be part of the intended audience of this study. First and foremost, those who work in higher education settings including administrators, faculty members, researchers, students, and academic affairs personnel are the primary targets for this study. It is hoped that they will learn new findings about a situation that might impact their work on campus. Students in higher education in general are also an intended audience as the data collected might be of interest to them. In particular, international students studying in this nation as well as other nations might find value in the findings of this study. Sociologists, psychologists, and social workers can also be considered to be part of the intended audience for this study. Furthermore, members of the vast and diverse LGBTQ community can also be included in the intended audience for this dissertation study. Finally, the media and society in general might be potential targets for the information garnered in this study. This could include American society as well as the broader international society of the modern world.

### **1.2.2 Strengths and weaknesses of the study**

A primary strength of the study was its ability to collect and present research that is relatively novel. As Renn (2010) mentioned, there has been a lack of research regarding international

students and LGBT issues in higher education scholarly endeavors. Another notable strength of this research pertains to the mixed methods nature of this study. This in-depth investigation over an extended amount of time was hoped to lead to a rich and interesting portrayal of the unique experiences of LGBTQ international students. Furthermore, in light of the transformative paradigm utilized to guide this study, it is hoped that findings can contribute to positive institutional and social changes on the campuses of this nation.

The primary weakness of the study relates to the somewhat small number of participants (69 out of 2,938) who ultimately completed the survey. It was surmised that it might be challenging to find a large number of participants who fit both of the minority categories for this study. Another possible weakness in terms of participant recruitment might have pertained to the social norms or taboos of the countries of origin of potential subjects. For example, students hailing from countries where LGBTQ identities are highly frowned upon or even illegal might have been reluctant to participate in a study that examines this potentially private aspect of their identity. Language barriers also might have contributed to a weakness in the study. It is possible that some potential respondents were reluctant to participate due to doubts regarding their mastery of the language. This may be particularly true for the interview component of the study.

It should be noted that the principal investigator of the study is an openly gay graduate student who has focused on LGBTQ research in higher education extensively in his doctoral studies. He is also an academic advisor at the University of Pittsburgh who has advised a considerable number of international students. His background and experiences might have served as a strength for the creation and implementation of this study. It is possible that participants, and the interviewees in particular, felt more comfortable and willing to divulge information about their lives due to his background. Conversely, it should be noted that it is possible that his background

might have served as a limitation to the study. Survey and interview participants might have been less willing to open up to him due to his openly gay status and/or position at the university. It is possible that some students might have feared about the confidentiality of the study due to the principal investigator's openly gay identity on campus and in the broader LGBTQ community in Pittsburgh.

### **1.2.3 Demographic information at the university**

As previously mentioned, the University of Pittsburgh is a large, urban Research I university. Demographic information which is pertinent to understanding the scope of this study has been collected by the university's Office of Institutional Research. According to that office, a total of 28,649 students were enrolled for the fall 2015 term on the campus (Institutional Research, 2016). The majority of these students, 18,908, were undergraduate students.

A total of 3,076 of the students on the university's campus were international students for the fall 2015 term (Institutional Research, 2016). This number was a rather sizeable amount of international students on the campus at approximately 10.7% of the entire student population. The majority of international students (2,289) were graduate students at the university. A total of 730 international students on the campus were undergraduates and 57 were doctorate-professional practice students. The majority of these international students (1,674) were from China. The other top countries of origin for international students at the university included India, Korea (Republic of), Brazil, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Canada, Columbia, and Turkey, in that order.

According to the Office of International Students, the number of international students for the 2016 spring term when this study was conducted was 2,938. This spring term total included 1,530 males and 1,399 females. The gender of nine students was not known. Since this dissertation

study was conducted in the 2016 spring term, the 2,938 total will be considered the potential pool for the study. As 69 students participated in this dissertation study, they comprised 2.35% of the potential student population pool for this study.

As of the 2014–2015 academic year, the Institute of International Education (2015) maintains that approximately 4.8% of the nation’s higher education students are international. A majority of these students are from China, followed by India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Canada, Brazil, and Taiwan, in that order. This national finding regarding top countries of origin for international students is demographically similar to that of the University of Pittsburgh.

Oba and Pope (2013) indicate that accurate estimates regarding how many international students in the U.S. identify as LGBT are not available at this time. Although this number is not available, Oba and Pope estimate that a considerable number of LGBT international students are studying throughout the nation. It is possible that an accurate number of individuals in this very specific subset of the student population may never be completely calculated as a result of the unwillingness of some individuals to divulge this information due to the continued prevalence of social taboos throughout the world. Despite this challenge, it is important to recognize that these individuals certainly live and learn on the campuses of the United States. This dissertation aims to explore their experiences and hopefully shed light on a subset of the student body which has often been overlooked in higher education research.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

After a period of tumultuous social and legal battles on the campuses of this nation, it was not until the latter part of the last century that LGBT individuals began to gain acceptance at institutions of higher education (Dilley, 2002). Initial research regarding this diverse population aimed to raise the visibility of LGBT students, faculty, and staff on campus (Renn, 2010). Subsequent research focused on the LGBT friendliness of campus climates throughout the country. According to Renn, more recent research has focused on the varied experiences of the wide array of different subsets of individuals that fall under the larger umbrella of LGBT. The experiences of one such subset, LGBT international students, have not been extensively examined in scholarly research (Rankin, 2006). The present literature review strives to explore the current scholarly literature and research regarding these students. Oba and Pope (2013) indicate that LGBT international students might confront many difficulties in their new academic and personal lives on American campuses as they grapple with factors related to their multiple identities as international students and LGBT-identifying individuals. Various researchers present suggestions for higher education professionals to follow in order to improve practices and policies for effectively promoting positive academic and personal experiences for LGBT international students (Greenblatt, 2004; Oba & Pope, 2013; Pope et al., 2007).

## 2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF LGBT STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Dilley (2002) maintains that the history of the LGBT student population in higher education can be viewed as an evolution from exclusion to integration. Dilley states that LGBT students have become a visible campus population who are supported by the very educational institutions that once tried to suppress them. This evolution on the nations' campuses was a long and tumultuous process which mirrored the social, institutional, and legal changes that occurred in this country over a long span of time. According to Dilley, there were no open or active gay and lesbian student organizations in this nation until the Student Homophile League was initiated in 1969 at Columbia University. Soon thereafter, students at Stanford and New York University created gay and lesbian student organizations (Cain, 1993). Dilley (2002) indicates that by 1978, over 200 campuses were known to have "homosexual organizations" on campus. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported in 1996 that there were over 2,000 official student organizations for non-heterosexual students on the nations' campuses (Gose, 1996). Dilley (2002) maintains that postsecondary institutions changed dramatically over the 30 years since the first gay student organizations began. At the present time, many educators and administrators actively work to design and implement programs that aid LGBT students' development and education according to Dilley.

Despite recent advances for LGBT students as well as faculty and staff on the country's campuses, a long history of exclusion and expulsion existed before the modern circumstances of inclusion and appreciation as Dilley maintains. Dilley indicates that postsecondary institutions strictly controlled the sexual mores of all students following World War II. Non-heterosexual males were particularly targeted during the 1940s and 1950s in this country. Dilley indicates that a vast array of higher education institutions from small, private, religious colleges to large, public,

state schools systematically attempted to establish jurisdiction over the social and sexual activities of gay men, or men who were suspected of being gay.

Dilley argues that postsecondary institutions exhibited four categories of regulation which followed each other sequentially from the end of World War II until the present day. The first stage of this progression was marked by institutions reacting to homosexual behavior, whether proven or suspected, with expulsion or other forms of harsh penalization. Dilley indicates that the era of expulsions of non-heterosexual students lasted from the 1940s to the 1960s. The second stage in this timeline involved covert operations of campuses to reveal homosexual students in undercover “stings” that were coordinated with the assistance of local police forces. The third stage in this historical progression is characterized as a time when higher education administrators moved from expelling homosexual students to “helping” or “treating” them with mental health professionals who were beginning to proliferate on campuses. Finally, the fourth stage of regulation of behaviors of homosexual students occurred after the medical profession no longer viewed homosexuality as an “illness.” This fourth stage before the more accepting modern era involved attempts by higher education officials to prevent LGBT students from forming student organizations and assembling.

Dilley indicates that the next stage in the progression of LGBT history on the nations’ campuses was marked by legal battles regarding free student speech and assembly. This time period spanned from the 1970s to the 1990s and occurred at a time when LGBT college students began to organize more openly and challenge institutional authority. Although expulsions and most entrapment efforts ended in the late 1960s, institutions aimed to attempt to deny or severely limit the rights of LGBT students to form campus organizations or hold on-campus events. The courts routinely ruled in favor of the students to freely speak and assemble. Although the main argument for these cases focused on the First Amendment, Mallory (1997) indicates that the equal

protections clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) of the United States Constitution can also be used to ensure the rights of LGBT university students at public institutions and the groups that they wish to form. After winning rights of assembly on college campuses, gay student organizations attempted to secure funding for their social and campus activities. LGBT students were generally successful at accomplishing this as well after many contentious legal battles across the country (Dilley, 2002).

In 2011, Elmhurst College in Illinois was recognized nationally by scholars and the media as being the first college that revised its admission application to include a question asking if the applicant identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Newhouse, 2013). According to Newhouse, Elmhurst College officials indicated that they wanted to make it clear that LGBT individuals are recognized and welcomed on their campus. The University of Iowa recently became the first public institution in the nation to also add this question to its admission application. Newhouse maintains that decisions such as these clearly emphasize a commitment to diversity and acceptance at institutions of higher education. Furthermore, this move indicates that the institution is open to and actively wants LGBT students to enroll at their school according to Newhouse.

## **2.2 GUIDING THEORIES OF THE STUDY**

A review of literature pertaining to studies aiming to analyze and improve the lives of often marginalized groups reveals that two ideological theories can be utilized to guide this particular study. The first theory, Critical theory, has been employed to examine social justice issues for almost a century. Queer theory is a more recently conceptualized theory that also can be used as a

lens to guide and interpret the goals of the present study. Both of these theories are explained in further detail in the forthcoming subsections.

### **2.2.1 Critical theory**

According to Salas et al. (2010), the origins of critical theory can be traced to a group of German social philosophers in the 1920s including Adorno and Horkheimer who were collectively known as the Frankfurt School. Critical theory evolved to some extent as a response to fascist and totalitarian thought that was gaining popularity in Europe during this time. Salas and her colleagues indicate that the general tenets of Critical theory are that by understanding social systems with a focus on power and control, individuals can become more conscious of the need for change, and resultantly work toward that change. Essentially, Critical theory can be a guide for social action. The theory urges for the examination of the social order and an investigation of why collective needs go unmet but existing power structures are maintained. Critical theory stresses that through the analysis of social structures, the knowledge gained can lead to social change and emancipation for those who are oppressed. Individuals can be empowered through Critical theory to overturn social arrangements that are perpetuating discrimination or marginalization according to Salas and her colleagues.

Salas et al. also indicate that the consciousness-raising movements led by feminists and African Americans during the 1960s and 1970s can be viewed as examples of applied Critical theory. The outcome of these movements was social change with individual empowerment. Ultimately, Critical theory aims to resist the imposition of oppressive and dominant norms and structures within social and/or institutional practices according to Salas and her colleagues. The

theory strives to embrace the dual mission of promoting the well-being of all humans as well as creating environments that are conducive to social justice.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a branch of critical theory that focuses specifically on racial inequalities within society and aims to facilitate positive changes. Various researchers have utilized CRT to examine factors in higher education that perpetuate disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups (Bernal, 2002; Hiraldo, 2010; Patton, 2015). Hiraldo (2010) argues that CRT can be utilized as an important tool when higher education institutions are striving to become more diverse and inclusive. For example, Hiraldo maintains that a predominantly White university which simply aims to increase the number of students of color on its campus is an inadequate goal if true institutional change is desired. Hiraldo argues that examining campus climate efforts to have more culturally competent students, staff, faculty, and administrators is a more effective way to become more diverse and inclusive. According to Hiraldo, counter-storytelling is a noteworthy method utilized by CRT in order to gain information from minority groups regarding potentially negative experiences on campus such as harassment or discrimination. Counter-stories are personal narratives of students on campus that can provide information which possibly exposes and critiques the dominant ideology of a college or university.

The present study is highly guided by the tenets of Critical theory as it aims to examine the campus climate of one particular university and to determine if a potentially marginalized group of students are encountering difficulties due to social and/or institutional inequities. Due to the participants' dual identities as international students as well as LGBTQ individuals, these social disparities may be particularly apparent. Furthermore, other factors such as race or ethnic background might also compound their experiences. A primary goal of this study is to analyze their experiences and then use this information to create positive social changes at the university,

and possibly other universities as well. This primary goal directly reflects a fundamental objective of Critical theory. Furthermore, the interview component of this study reflects the use of counter-stories to gain information under the tenets of CRT.

### **2.2.2 Queer theory**

According to Lovaas et al. (2006), Queer theory is a relatively recent theoretical development which began in the early 1990s. Queer theory is conceptually aligned with postmodernism and poststructuralism and stresses that sexual orientation and gender identity are not binary and static, but can be multiple and dynamic according to Lovaas and her colleagues. Renn (2010) indicates that Queer theory can be used to examine problems in research that question normative constructions of socially constructed binaries such as male/female and gay/straight. Abes and Kasch (2007) maintain that Queer theory critically analyzes the meaning of identity, focusing on the intersections of identities and resisting oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender with the aim to facilitate societal change. According to Mayo (2007), Queer theory arose to expand beyond the confines of the acronym LGBT to include a wider array of individuals and groups who identify in non-normative and non-binary manners in regards to sexual orientation or gender identity.

Abes and Kasch (2007) indicate that genders and sexualities reflect the time and place in which they exist and the individuals who enact them. As a result, the expression of gender or sexuality is unstable and changes as the individual affects society and as society affects the individual. Furthermore, Abes and Kasch argue that heteronormativity clouds perceptions of non-heterosexual individuals in society. They define heteronormativity as the use of heterosexuality as the norm for understanding gender and sexuality. Heteronormativity creates binaries of

identification to separate individuals into two distinct groups. Abes and Kasch maintain that use of the label LGBT is a heteronormative construct that consolidates all non-heterosexual individuals into one group, thus reinforcing a binary. As a result, heteronormativity creates the perception that heterosexuality defines what is natural or acceptable. Abes and Kasch suggest that Queer theory strives to provide a framework for resisting heteronormativity in research and in society as a whole.

Renn (2010) maintains that Queer theory should be utilized more often in order to critically analyze the highly complex meaning of identity as well as resist oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation and gender in higher education research. The present study aims to utilize certain tenets of Queer theory to guide its implementation. For example, it has been decided to include queer as an option for sexual identity on the survey. Furthermore, participants were given the option to submit their own identities for both sexual identity and gender based on the tenet of Queer theory espousing that these constructs are limitless. Finally, similar to the aims of Critical theory, the goal of Queer theory is to analyze the experiences of marginalized groups in order to facilitate social and structural changes. The present study aspires to accomplish all of these goals eventually in its examination of a particular higher education institution.

### **2.3 SCHOLARLY RESEARCH REGARDING LGBT STUDENTS**

According to various scholars, research focusing on the development of LGBT individuals in higher education was sparse prior to the mid-1990s (Hoover, 2009; Renn, 2010). However, over the past two decades, the body of research regarding LGBT issues in higher education has grown considerably. Renn (2010) indicates that this research began in the 1970s with studies that aimed to raise the visibility of LGBT students, faculty, and staff on campus. Kane (2013) argues that

much of this earlier research which aimed to raise the visibility of these individuals focused on LGBT identity formation. Subsequent research focused on the friendliness of campus climates towards LGBT individuals and their needs. Campus climate surveys continue to be of interest to researchers and the largest, most recent survey was conducted by an organization called Campus Pride in 2010 (Rankin et al., 2010). Another branch of recent research strives to examine the experiences of the many different subsets of individuals that fall under the umbrella of the LGBT community (Renn, 2010). For example, more recent research has begun to explore the complex interaction of multiple identities on campus such as race and ethnicity in relation to LGBT identification. Furthermore, a growing body of research has examined the unique experiences of transgender students in recent years (Newhouse, 2013). Newhouse argues that transgender students have often been overlooked by higher education professionals due to the more complicated constructs associated with gender identity.

Despite this expansion in inquiry, Renn (2010) argues that researchers must focus on new areas of research regarding LGBT persons in higher education in order to truly advance theory, research, and practice pertaining to this topic. Renn presents a literature review of the recent state of research regarding LGBT issues in higher education. She exhibits a thorough history of LGBT research in higher education which began in the 1970s to raise visibility and normalcy for the community. Since the mid-1990s, campus climate surveys have been a major focus of LGBT higher education research according to Renn. As previously mentioned, more recent research has focused on specific segments of the LGBT population and their unique experiences and difficulties on campus. Furthermore, various studies over the past decade have examined the need for LGBT resource centers that serve the educational and personal needs of this population of students (Fine, 2012).

Rankin (2006) maintains that the challenge for college campuses is to not only provide inclusive structures, programs, and policies for LGBT individuals, but to also measure these initiatives via systematic, empirical research. Rankin argues that much of the empirical research on LGBT issues in higher education is often anecdotal reflections on the experiences of a small number of participants. She claims that this is particularly true of studies focusing on the experiences of certain segments of the LGBT community such as students of color, students with disabilities, and transgender students. Rankin stresses the importance of actively changing the environment of college campuses in order to effectively impact the lives of these students. She advises campuses to create centers for interdisciplinary study and cross-cultural study of LGBT issues. Rankin also suggests that faculty should be encouraged to infuse LGBT issues into the curriculums of their courses in order to foster a more knowledgeable and tolerant atmosphere.

### **2.3.1 Campus climate studies**

As aforementioned, campus climate studies have been the focus of a considerable amount of research regarding LGBT individuals in higher education since the 1990s (Renn, 2010). Brown and Gortmaker (2009) maintain that the importance of campus climate studies lies in their ability to empower LGBT students by demonstrating that the institution cares enough to be concerned about them and their needs. Furthermore, various researchers argue that a campus climate that promotes diversity and advocacy for LGBT students enables them to have more positive and productive experiences on campus (Brown et al., 2004; Evans & Herriott, 2004). Various researchers maintain that historically more advantaged groups, such as White people, males, and heterosexuals, have expressed more positive views of a campus's climate than those of historically

disadvantaged groups such as racial and ethnic minorities, women, and LGBT individuals (Brown et al., 2004; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

Campus Pride is a well-known educational advancement organization that strives to conduct research regarding LGBT affairs in higher education through the work of scholars from many institutions throughout the nation ([www.campuspride.org](http://www.campuspride.org)). On the Campus Pride website, Rankin et al. (2010) present the *2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People* report which is the most comprehensive empirical research study of its kind to date. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered in this mixed methods study. The survey was completed by 5,149 students, staff, faculty, and administrators from all 50 states and from all Carnegie Basic Classifications of higher education institutions in the spring of 2009. Participants were quite diverse regarding age, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

The study by Rankin and her colleagues is cited profusely in the academic literature and research regarding LGBT campus climates due to its large participant sample. The researchers found that LGBT respondents experienced significantly greater harassment and discrimination than their heterosexual counterparts and were more likely to indicate that the harassment was based on sexual identity. Overall, 23% of LGBT students, faculty, and staff reported being the victim of harassment on campus according to Rankin et al. Harassment included hearing derogatory remarks made about them (61.1%), feeling deliberately ignored or excluded (47%), feeling isolated or left out (40%), feeling bullied or intimidated (30.1%), and fearing for personal safety (12.7%). In addition, 3.3% of respondents reported being a victim of a crime and 3.2% of the participants indicated that they were the target of physical violence. According to Rankin and her colleagues, one-third of LGBT participants considered leaving their higher education institution due to a

perceived hostile climate. Interestingly, LGBT faculty members reported more negative perceptions of campus climate than their LGBT student and staff counterparts.

Rankin and her colleagues found that transgender individuals reported more negative perceptions of campus climate in comparison to individuals who identified as male or female. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) maintain that transgender students are often completely ignored or invisible in the university structures of this nation. Beemyn and Rankin argue that few colleges and universities have established comprehensive policies and practices for addressing the needs of transgender students. McKinney (2005) also analyzed the campus climate for transgender students from 61 different institutions of varying kinds, from public to private, and determined that most of the participants reported that the climate for transgender students was hostile. Furthermore, McKinney found that a majority of transgender students indicated that their colleges lacked adequate resources and education for transgender issues.

Sanlo (2004) maintains that some negative consequences of a less welcoming climate for LGBT students on campus include higher levels of stress, isolation, and drop-out rates. Furthermore, Westefeld et al. (2001) found that lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students were more likely to report feeling higher levels of loneliness and depression than their heterosexual peers. Johnson et al. (2013) argue that an unwelcoming campus climate can lead to feelings of isolation and depression and therefore place LGBT students at a higher risk for suicide. Johnson and his colleagues cite extensive media coverage of the suicide of a gay Rutgers University student who committed suicide due largely to harassment he received from his college roommate.

Kane (2013) maintains that a crucial indicator of a supportive campus climate for LGBT students is the existence of an LGBT student organization. Kane indicates that in the past, LGBT student groups were important in the mobilization of the larger national movement. Today, they

continue to offer opportunities for activism but are also viewed as important opportunities for social support and student retention. Despite these positive outcomes from LGBT student organizations, Kane found that many campus administrations, including those at some religious institutions in particular, continue to prevent these groups from being officially recognized. Kane set out to determine the likelihood of having an LGBT student group in postsecondary institutions in the state of North Carolina. She found that institutions with LGBT student groups were more likely to be those with more students, higher endowments, and more selectivity in admission procedures. Furthermore, Kane determined that institutions *without* LGBT student organizations were more likely to be religious, have higher proportions of African American students, and have more students receiving student loans.

Holland et al. (2013) focused on specific individual variables which may contribute to a more welcoming climate for LGBT individuals. Holland and her colleagues conducted their study at a midsized, Southeastern, public university and found that higher levels of LGBT tolerance were consistently observed among women and those who identify as LGBT. Their findings showed that Protestants exhibited lower levels of tolerance in comparison to Catholics, Anglicans, non-Christians, and the non-religious. African Americans and individuals who identified as multi-racial were found to exhibit less tolerance for LGBT people than White participants. The researchers also found that students in the College of Liberal Arts reported more accepting attitudes than those in the Schools of Engineering or Business. Furthermore, Holland and her colleagues claim that students who are further along in their college careers appeared to be more tolerant than younger students in general. Finally, student participants who identified as Republican were found to be less tolerant on average than those who identified as Democrats.

Rankin and Reason (2008) have developed a Transformational Tapestry Model to describe how campus climate is influenced by six interconnected factors that affect the learning and social outcomes of students as well as the personal and professional development of faculty, staff, and administrators. These factors include: (1) access to higher education and supports for success and retention, (2) encouragement of diversity, (3) a diverse student body, (4) diversity education and training, (5) a university commitment to diversity and social justice through policies addressing discrimination and harassment, and (6) acknowledgement of the influence of government and society on the campus climate. Rankin and Reason argue that when higher education professionals strive to promote the factors of their model and create a more inclusive campus, they can positively impact the learning, social, and professional outcomes of all campus members.

### **2.3.2 Identity formation in college students**

As aforementioned, Kane (2013) indicates that much of the earlier scholarly research regarding LGBT individuals in higher education examined proposed stage models of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity formation and how these stages progress in college students. The Homosexual Identity Model created by Cass (1979) was the first such model and consisted of six stages that were utilized to explain the coming out process. These six steps included: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Although the Cass model set an important precedent for LGBT scholarly research, it was criticized in later years for being too linear and myopic and for failing to take into account the growing diversity within the LGBT community (Renn, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2006).

During the 1980s and 1990s, various researchers proposed newer, more complex models for sexual orientation development that challenged the linear model Cass (1979) proposed. For

example, Troiden (1988) created a four-stage model which allowed for movement back and forth between stages. D'Augelli (1994) developed a six-stage model that emphasized the importance of environmental factors on identity development. Furthermore, Fassinger and Miller (1996) proposed a four-stage model that included these stages: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis. Stage models have been analyzed in relation to the development of LGBT college students in various studies (Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003; Stevens, 2004). However, these studies determined that identity development in LGBT students may be much more complex than the stage theories that have been developed.

Savin-Williams (2006) argues that stage models are much too linear and fail to address the various contexts that shape one's experiences as an LGBT individual such as race, class, and family dynamics. Savin-Williams also suggests that stage models may not be as relevant any longer as individuals are coming out at younger ages now. He indicates that higher education professionals should realize that more students are coming to college with a synthesized identity already in place and that student services at the institution should reflect this societal shift. However, Savin-Williams reminds higher education administrators that not all students will come to college already out and that some students will develop an LGBT identity on campus.

Beemyn and Rankin (2011) strive to remind higher education professionals that gender identity formation also often occurs during the college years. In fact, the researchers have found that a growing number of students are coming out as transgender on campuses across the nation. Beemyn and Rankin stress that higher educational professionals must understand that gender identity is separate and distinct from sexual orientation identity. Furthermore, Beemyn and Rankin argue that the rise of transgender students raises many questions regarding the implementation of

proper and comprehensive policies regarding programming, housing, bathrooms and locker rooms, physical and mental health care, and record keeping.

Beemyn and Rankin indicate that most colleges and universities are simply not prepared for the growing number of transgender students. For example, most college curricula and extracurricular activities do not deviate from the traditional male/female binary categories of gender expression and identity. Furthermore, Beemyn and Rankin maintain that most faculty, staff, and students have not had training regarding gender identity formation and the diverse array of possible gender identities. Beemyn et al. (2005) also found that many transgender individuals feel that there is a lack of transgender role models in faculty and administrative positions on college campuses. Finally, due to the predominance of single-sexed bathrooms and locker rooms in institutions throughout the country, Beemyn et al. found that some transgender students actively avoid participating in campus recreation, taking physical education courses, and even using bathrooms on campus in order to avoid potential harassment, discrimination, or violence.

### **2.3.3 LGBT campus resource centers**

Sanlo et al. (2006) maintain that LGBT campus resource centers promote the transformation of campuses into welcoming and respectful places where social justice prevails. Sanlo and her colleagues created a resource of theoretical and practical information and guidance for the development and implementation of an LGBT resource center on a college or university campus. The researchers present a wealth of historical and practical information for higher education professionals who are investigating the idea of developing an LGBT resource center or who are in the process of actually implementing such a center. Numerous case studies within the book focusing on the events surrounding the creation of LGBT resource centers at campuses across the

nation are highly detailed and informative. Sanlo and her colleagues indicate that these centers have primarily been created for three reasons: (1) in response to a homophobic incident on campus; (2) in response to insistence by students, faculty, and/or staff for the existence of a “safe space” for LGBT individuals within the institution; and (3) to foster diversity and provide a more welcoming campus climate. The authors guide professionals through the strategic planning of an LGBT resource center including creating a vision, mission statement, goals, and action plan. Sanlo and her colleagues also discuss some of the many functions of a center or office such as crisis intervention, discussion groups, student organization advising, and consultation services with departments on campus or even with the broader local community. Furthermore, the authors outline steps for advocacy work on campus regarding issues such as negotiating for domestic partner benefits and creating nondiscrimination clauses.

Fine (2012) examined the likelihood of an institution having a resource center devoted to the needs and concerns of LGBT students in a quantitative empirical study. These centers strive to provide academic, emotional, or social support for LGBT students, faculty, and staff while advocating comprehensive inclusion within the wider university community. According to Fine, the first LGBT campus center was founded in 1971 at the University of Michigan. Fine argues that political opportunity and resource mobilization theory can be used to provide a framework for understanding the contextual factors that might affect whether an institution has such a center. She conducted research by examining data taken from the 2005 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System which is maintained by the U.S. Department of Education. The final sample size that Fine utilized consisted of 1,751 American postsecondary institutions from the non-profit, four-year sector. Fine found that 141 institutions from the sample (8%) had an LGBT resource center on campus. Her findings indicate that public institutions with more prestige, higher selectivity,

higher tuition rates, and locations in more politically liberal areas of the nation (generally the northern and western sections of the U.S.) are more likely to have an LGBT resource center. These findings support her hypothetical theories for the existence of such centers. Perhaps the most important observation that Fine makes relates to the fact that unfortunately, it is the institutions that do not have LGBT resource centers which may need them the most.

Wright and McKinley (2011) set out to analyze the availability of services and resources for LGBT students at college counseling centers in a quantitative empirical study. The researchers examined a randomly selected stratified national sample of 203 college counseling centers at four-year institutions in the United States. Wright and McKinley analyzed the web sites of their counseling centers and assessed the services provided by those centers for LGBT students. They found that targeted information for LGBT students was relatively infrequent. For example, less than one-third of counseling center web sites described individual counseling for LGBT individuals. Furthermore, less than 11% offered LGBT group counseling services and less than 6% presented pamphlets with additional information for these students which were created by the university. The researchers maintain that these findings are alarming in light of past research illuminating the social, institutional, and psychological difficulties that LGBT individuals might confront on campus. Wright and McKinley indicate that counseling centers at larger, nonreligious institutions with larger numbers of counselors were more likely to publicize LGBT-specific services. The researchers urge higher education professionals to initiate more services or increase the visibility of such services. They acknowledge that a primary limitation of their study pertains to their monitoring of web sites without asking for more qualitative input from directors and counselors working at those counseling centers. Future research undertaking this endeavor is encouraged by the researchers.

Aside from LGBT resource centers, many institutions have implemented Safe Zone programs in order to improve the campus climate by increasing awareness of LGBT issues and providing skills for individuals to combat homophobia and heterosexism as well as promote activism (Young & McKibbin, 2013). Young and McKibbin indicate that Safe Zones are tailored to fit the unique needs of each particular college or university. However, the ultimate goal of all Safe Zone programs is to provide visible support for LGBT individuals on campus. Participants in the Safe Zone program typically post a rainbow sign in their work space or wear a rainbow sticker or pin which visibly marks them as a “safe” person, advocate, and/or ally for LGBT people. Safe Zone training is given before an individual can officially be deemed a member of the program. According to Young and McKibbin, this training stresses the importance of maintaining a well-balanced perspective and recognizing that each member of the vast LGBT community has a wide variety of experiences, both positive and negative, on campus and in life in general.

#### **2.3.4 Implications for LGBT college students**

According to Rankin (2003), the unique challenges that LGBT individuals encounter on campus might prevent them from reaching their full academic potential. These students might feel disengaged from campus life and decide to not fully participate in student life activities. Furthermore, Sherrill and Hardesty (1994) maintain that LGBT students are more likely to drop out or have academic problems when they are faced with chronic stress associated with discrimination or harassment. At the present time in higher education, student retention has become a very important and extensively researched topic (Sanlo, 2004). Although numerous retention studies have focused on many different student demographic characteristics, there has been a lack of research on the retention of LGBT students (Carpenter, 2009; Sanlo, 2004).

Holland et al. (2013) indicate that it is important to recognize that it is common for college students to “come out” during their formative college years. As a result, Holland and her colleagues maintain that postsecondary institutions must strive to combat homophobia and heterosexism on their campuses. Rankin (2005) argues that higher education professionals can promote transformational change by establishing centers for interdisciplinary study and by teaching issues regarding diversity and tolerance through social science courses for students of all disciplines, and preferably earlier in their college careers. Rankin also suggests inviting LGBT students and community leaders to classrooms in order to speak about their experiences. Furthermore, she maintains that mandating tolerance programs as part of early socialization for incoming students might prove to be an efficient way to improve the overall climate of the campus. Brown et al. (2004) indicate that it is important to include heterosexual students in these programs as well in order to foster respect and understanding. Finally, Holland et al. (2013) suggest that “out” and supportive faculty, staff, and students contribute to the success of LGBT students. Holland and her colleagues argue that supportive staff, faculty, and administrators can promote acceptance and diversity so that campuses are places where all students can be safe and feel free to be open about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Ryan et al. (2014) also suggest that Safe Zones with allies on campus can be beneficial for LGBT individuals at an institution. These researchers emphasize that any individual of any sexual orientation or gender identity can be an effective ally. In fact, they argue that it is not necessary for campus allies or Safe Zone members to divulge their own sexual orientation, but rather it is more important to focus on the needs of the individual seeking out support. They also urge campuses to seek out training for LGBT allies through resources offered by the Campus Pride organization ([www.campuspride.org](http://www.campuspride.org)). The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals also

offers resources for promoting equality on campus ([www.lgbtcampus.org](http://www.lgbtcampus.org)). Finally, Ryan et al. advise higher education professionals to seek out resources and guidance from the Human Rights Campaign which is the previously mentioned well-known organization that strives to build equality within educational as well as corporate establishments ([www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)).

Rankin et al. (2010) provide a number of potential best practices for higher education professionals to implement in order to promote a more welcoming environment for LGBT individuals on campus. Rankin and her colleagues urge administrators to create policies that explicitly express an institutional commitment to diversity and acceptance. The researchers also emphasize the importance of integrating LGBT issues and concerns into the academic curriculum across different disciplines. Officials are also urged to respond appropriately and quickly to homophobic incidents on campus. Furthermore, Rankin and her colleagues maintain that institutions should actively create spaces for open dialogue between students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. This could occur through student affairs or on-campus housing programs. Moreover, Rankin et al. emphasize the importance of having well-trained and empathetic student health and mental health practitioners who are aware of the unique challenges and concerns of the LGBT community. Finally, they encourage higher education professionals to strive to vocally support social justice and advocacy for LGBT individuals in order to improve the climate of the campus. Rankin and her colleagues suggest that modeling support of social justice and advocacy on campus can ultimately lead to a more meaningful educational experience for students as well as an increase in student retention rates.

In regards to transgender individuals, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) stipulate that it is imperative for colleges and universities to implement institutional changes in order to promote positive educational, personal, and professional experiences. For example, a growing number of

colleges and universities are adding “gender identity and/or expression” to their nondiscrimination policies. Beemyn and Rankin indicate that many institutions are also creating gender-inclusive bathrooms and locker rooms as well as gender-inclusive housing options. Another step that many universities have taken involves the possibility of transgender students to change their names and genders to their liking on public records and documents. According to Beemyn and Rankin, some universities are also covering costs for hormones and surgeries for transitioning students as part of student health insurance. Furthermore, McKinney (2005) suggests that universities should encourage the formation of student groups specifically for transgender students. Finally, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) maintain that higher education settings must begin to acknowledge and embrace the fact that the traditional notion of a gender binary (strictly male or female), has been replaced by a myriad of potential gender identities.

## **2.4 RESEARCH REGARDING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

As previously mentioned, in the 2014–2015 academic year, the number of international students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs in the United States increased 10% to a record high of 974,926 students, and this number is continuing to grow (Institute of International Education, 2015). Approximately 4.8% of the nation’s higher education students are international according to the Institute of International Education. A majority of these students are from five countries which include China (31%) followed by India (14%), South Korea (7%), Saudi Arabia (6%), and Canada (3%). Brazil, Japan, Mexico, Taiwan, and Vietnam round out the top ten countries where students hail from with 2% of the nation’s international students coming from each of these five countries respectively. Oba and Pope (2013) indicate that international students

bring a wide variety of benefits to the nation. For example, they contribute to intellectual exchange between nations and help to build mutual understanding. Oba and Pope maintain that they also enrich American higher education with their talents and diverse perspectives. Furthermore, international students contributed an estimated US\$30.5 billion to the U.S. economy in 2015 (Institute of International Education, 2015).

Zhang and Goodson (2011) contend that despite their numerous contributions to higher education in the U.S., international students have received very limited attention from higher education researchers. Zhang and Goodson maintain that it is surprising that so little empirical research is available to understand the sociocultural adjustment of international students as well as the psychological stressors they may face in this nation. They maintain that these students might encounter a myriad of difficulties relating to academic stress and a lack of social support.

According to various researchers, international students confront numerous stress factors on and off campus such as cultural differences, discrimination, language barriers, academic problems, and financial difficulties (McClure, 2007; Oba & Pope, 2013; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Racial discrimination, alienation, and homesickness may also impact international students in higher education in this country (McClure, 2007). In fact, in a study conducted by Williams and Johnson (2011), they found that some international students claimed that U.S. students frequently behaved in ethnocentric and racist manners, including name calling. Williams and Johnson also reported that international students claimed that programs intending to promote multicultural interactions on campus failed to attract U.S. students to participate.

According to Jackson et al. (2013), acculturative stress is common among international students and results from the stress associated with learning to live in a new cultural setting. Jackson and her colleagues indicate that factors such as region of origin, English fluency, and

social support appear to play important roles in the experience of acculturative stress in international students. They also claim that acculturative stress can have a consistent negative impact on international students' development in this country. In their study, Jackson and her colleagues found that higher acculturative stress and less social support were associated with more depressive symptoms and more difficulty with sociocultural adjustment for international students.

In terms of social support, various researchers have found that international students tend to form networks of friends that primarily consist of other international students, and individuals from their own countries in particular (Maundeni, 2001; Neri & Ville, 2008). These researchers maintain that these networks of fellow international students may serve to attenuate stress and offer emotional support. However, reliance on international student friendships may inhibit forming friendships with students from the host country and this might negatively impact language acquisition and cultural adjustment as a result (Maundeni, 2001). In a study examining this phenomenon, Hendrickson et al. (2011) found that international students with a higher ratio of friends from the host country in their network claimed to be more satisfied, content, and socially connected. Furthermore, Maundeni (2001) found that international students with a higher ratio of friends from their host country reported less feelings of homesickness.

Sherry et al. (2009) conducted a case study on the campus of the University of Toledo in order to examine the experiences of international students. Sherry and his colleagues found that these students confronted a variety of difficulties in their new surroundings such as adapting to a new culture, language barriers, financial problems, and a lack of understanding from the broader university community. In light of these findings, Sherry and his colleagues make numerous suggestions for improvements including initiatives to raise the profile of international students, improved financial assistance and scholarship programs, and the creation of more opportunities

for improving English speaking skills. In order to raise the profile of international students, Sherry and his colleagues recommend creating programs and events that enhance cross-cultural understanding and provide more opportunities for these students to become involved in the campus and local community.

## **2.5 RESEARCH REGARDING LGBT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

As previously mentioned, Oba and Pope (2013) indicate that accurate estimates regarding how many international students in this country who identify as LGBT are not available at this time. Although this number is not available, Oba and Pope estimate that there is a considerable number of LGBT international students scattered across the nation. They argue that LGBT international students encounter multiple issues during their educational experiences including developing their sexual identity, having questions related to coming out, forming intimate relationships, and coping with health related problems. Furthermore, Oba and Pope argue that these students may have a challenging time navigating between their cultural community and the LGBT community on campus.

Greenblatt (2004) argues that American classmates, faculty, and staff are often unable to grasp the differences among international students from a particular country. Greenblatt maintains that higher education professionals must be cognizant of the multiple ethnicities, religions, and languages of a group of students from one particular country. For example, Greenblatt argues that most Americans cannot distinguish between the numerous ethnicities of China such as Han, Mongolians, Chinese Koreans, Hui, Bai, Yi, Manchus, and Tibetans, etc. Greenblatt warns that conceptualizing international students as part of a “majority” group from their homeland inhibits

discussion regarding differences that may exist within these groups, including sexual orientation and gender identity.

Greenblatt also indicates that higher education professionals must understand the diversity within the international student population in relation to sexuality and gender and how these constructs are viewed within certain societies. For example, a substantial number of international students come from societies pervaded by political ideologies and/or religious dogmas which frown upon or even criminalize non-heterosexual behavior. Greenblatt contends that in contemporary American society, it is possible for LGBT individuals to find safe spaces, even if it is limited to a more private sector of secular society in certain, more conservative areas of this country. In contrast, many LGBT international students come from societies where finding a safe space is nearly impossible. However, Greenblatt maintains that rapid social change, the internet, the international media, and globalization have broken the walls of silence around LGBT issues and have begun to undermine homophobia and heterosexism in many places across the planet. In fact, Greenblatt indicates that the internet may be the place where most international students turn to learn about sexuality.

### **2.5.1 An examination of research on LGBT international students**

According to Rankin (2006), there has been a lack of research focusing on the experiences of international students in higher education who also identify as LGBT. Renn (2010) also maintains that the unique experiences of LGBT international students have not been extensively examined by scholars and researchers. Renn argues that LGBT issues pertaining to globalization and internationalism in higher education may be an uncharted territory of possible research. Renn also indicates that country-based and international comparative studies of LGBT issues in higher

education may provide excellent opportunities to expand theoretical knowledge of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, Renn contends that research regarding international issues and LGBT topics can be used to improve policy, curricula, and programs in higher education in this nation and throughout the world.

An examination of the current research regarding LGBTQ international students reveals that one study regarding this topic has been conducted in North America (Patrick, 2014). In this study, seven LGBTQ international students attending a Canadian university participated in semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences at the institution and in the nation. It should be noted that same-sex marriage has been legal in Canada since 2005 and employment discrimination against LGBTQ individuals has been illegal since 1998 according to Patrick. All seven of the subjects reported that the climate of the university as well as the climate of the nation in general was more accepting than their respective home countries. Furthermore, most of the participants reported changes in their sexual orientation and gender identities that reflected their more accepting surroundings. Patrick maintains that these changes in identity reflect the social constructivist nature of sexual orientation and gender identity and how these constructs can change in relation to time and place.

Greenblatt (2005) indicates that it is important for higher education professionals to understand that the socio-political space allotted to people of differing sexual orientations and gender identities varies widely from one country to another. Greenblatt urges higher education faculty and staff to remember that sexual orientation and gender identity cannot simply be assumed when working with international students. For example, notions of feminine or masculine body language or behavior vary significantly from one nation to another. As a result, Greenblatt warns professionals against making assumptions with international students. Greenblatt also suggests

that the risks of coming out for LGBT international students may be very high. According to the researcher, a first priority for diversity education and training when working with international students at universities should be to embrace a very broad spectrum of the categories of diversity in the world.

Oba and Pope (2013) maintain that LGBT international students have unique issues and needs in coping with their academic and personal lives in the United States. Oba and Pope claim that there are various primary issues that LGBT international students confront which include developing their own sexual identity, coming out in an assortment of academic and social settings, building relationships, returning to home countries, and potentially different health-related issues from domestic students. Pope et al. (2007) maintain that many of these students do not go through this process of sexual identity development in their home countries due to homophobia and discrimination. Furthermore, LGBT international students might struggle with defining their sexual or gender identity as individuals who have a dual identity, as an international student as well as a native of their own country (Oba & Pope, 2013).

Oba and Pope also contend that because LGBT international students may have hidden their sexual identities in their home country, they may find it difficult to navigate through their identity development in the United States as well. In fact, coming to the United States, which is known to have a more accepting atmosphere on some campuses, may not make coming out any easier for these students according to Oba and Pope. LGBT international students may need to decide how to come out to fellow international students as well as domestic students. Forming intimate relationships in this country may also be a challenge because these students may be accustomed to a different way of relating with others intimately in comparison to individuals from the United States. Furthermore, Oba and Pope indicate that age and gender roles can also

complicate matters for LGBT international students due to cultural differences. For example, in Japanese culture, age and gender roles significantly impact intimate behavior between same-sex partners (Pope et al., 2007). It is apparent that some students may be challenged to adjust their relationship styles to fit into U.S. culture as a result of these differences (Oba & Pope, 2013).

Pope et al. (2007) also maintain that LGBT international students may not have had the opportunity in their home countries to learn about the practices of safe sex, preventing sexually transmitted diseases, and how to access health care if necessary. Although many campuses across the country have student health clinics, some do not, and this may pose a significant problem for LGBT international students who are unfamiliar with looking for such services in a new country (Oba & Pope, 2013). Furthermore, LGBT international students may not know whether they should disclose their sexual orientation to health care workers. Oba and Pope also contend that language barriers may present difficulties when communicating with health care professionals.

According to Oba and Pope, LGBT international students might also confront challenges when they return to their home countries, particularly if their home country is not LGBT-affirmative. These students may return to their home countries and have numerous issues to confront such as whether to disclose a sexual identity that they might have developed in the United States. Oba and Pope indicate that LGBT international students might be fearful to disclose their identities to their families. Their familial and cultural environment may not allow for individuals to come out and may expect for one to marry someone of the opposite gender. Oba and Pope maintain that such fears may lead some of these students to question whether they should return home at all.

Quach et al. (2013) examined the experiences of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Chinese international students in the United States. During the 2014–2015 academic year, the largest

number of international students in the U. S. came from China (Institute of International Education, 2015). A total of 304,040 Chinese students, representing 31% of all international students studying in the U.S., were documented by the Institute of International Education. Quach and his colleagues argue that sexual identity development is particularly challenging for Chinese international students due to familial responsibilities and expectations. These challenges result from being socialized in a culture that values filial piety, which involves obedience to and respect for one's parents as well as avoiding causing shame for one's family. Quach and his colleagues indicate that family needs and obligations are often deemed as more important than personal desires in Chinese culture.

As a predominantly collectivist culture, identity formation in China depends largely on relationships within family and society (Liu & Choi, 2006). Therefore, Chinese sexual minority students may have difficulties developing an identity in the self-oriented individualistic culture of this nation (Quach, et al., 2013). Moreover, Quach and his colleagues claim that Chinese international students often confront the dual challenges of struggling to integrate their ethnic identities in mainstream North American culture along with questioning their sexual identity. Thus, the identity development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Chinese international students may be highly complex as they encounter racial, ethnic, and cultural factors in this country. Quach and his colleagues urge researchers to begin to conduct empirical research regarding Chinese LGBT international students as there is a lack of such research at the present time. Quach et al. maintain that this research may be crucial as the number of Chinese students studying in the United States continues to grow.

## **2.5.2 Implications for higher education professionals**

Oba and Pope (2013) indicate that because LGBT international students may develop their sexual identities in the United States, higher education professionals must be aware of the unique problems that these students may encounter as well as how to assist them on campus. In particular, Oba and Pope contend that campus mental health professionals must be prepared to effectively and empathetically help LGBT international students navigate through their potentially challenging college experience. For example, these students may need assistance or guidance in determining ways to manage their new identities with their friends and families in the United States as well as back home according to Oba and Pope.

Greenblatt (2004) offers a variety of potentially effective ways for faculty and staff to create a more welcoming campus climate for LGBT international students. For example, instructors can be urged to place a comment on the class syllabus stating that all students are equally respected in the classroom regardless of race, nationality, religion, disability, gender identity, and/or sexual orientation. Furthermore, Greenblatt indicates that announcing multicultural events on campus as well as LGBT-specific events during class may allow students to feel more comfortable in their setting and to recognize that their instructor is most likely aware of the importance of recognizing diversity on campus. Moreover, Greenblatt maintains that Safe Zone stickers on office or classroom doors can also signal to LGBT international students that an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance is promoted at the institution.

As previously mentioned, Oba and Pope (2013) maintain that a higher education institution's mental health counseling services must be adequately prepared to assist LGBT international students. However, Pope et al. (2007) argue that international students in general might not know exactly what "counseling services" means. Various researchers indicate that many

international students might have no direct experience with counseling and might feel uncomfortable about sharing one's feelings with a stranger (Jackson et al., 2013; Oba & Pope, 2013). As a result, Oba and Pope (2013) contend that counselors must recognize that it may take a considerable amount of time to effectively establish rapport with an LGBT international student.

According to Oba and Pope, the international student office on a campus must recognize that it is a crucial means of disseminating information that may assist LGBT students. Oba and Pope advise universities to ensure that communication between the international student office and the university counseling center remains open and current in order to provide the best help for LGBT international students. Furthermore, Oba and Pope indicate that it is crucial for these offices to be aware of resources in the local community that might be helpful for LGBT individuals such as local support groups at nearby community centers. However, the majority of these services are designed for individuals who are native to the U.S. As a result, Oba and Pope stress that higher education professionals must remember that cultural differences, languages barriers, and marginalization within the LGBT community itself might deter some international students from participating in activities at local community centers. Finally, various researchers suggest that LGBT international students may face distress due to reverse culture shock upon returning to their home countries (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Leung, 2007). As a result, mental health professionals at higher education institutions should be encouraged to help LGBT international students who are preparing to return home with coping skills and resources for additional assistance (Oba & Pope, 2013).

Oba and Pope also suggest various ways that higher education professionals can advocate for LGBT international students. For example, mental health professionals on campus can educate faculty and staff about the difficulties that LGBT international students might face on campus.

This education might be particularly crucial for English as a Second Language instructors and the staff in offices for international students. Oba and Pope also indicate that faculty and staff can be directed to online resources presented by the Rainbow Special Interest Group of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers ([www.rainbowsig.org](http://www.rainbowsig.org)). Furthermore, Oba and Pope urge college professionals to develop awareness of their own culture as well as the cultures of their students. In particular, Oba and Pope contend that it may be imperative for university representatives to be aware of the dichotomy between individualist and collectivist cultures.

Tseng and Newton (2002) suggest that higher education administrators and counselors can assist in establishing a social network for LGBT international students. This may include implementing mentoring programs with American students on campus. Furthermore, Oba and Pope (2013) advise institutions to consider having LGBT international students stay with LGBT host families in this country. Oba and Pope maintain that LGBT host families can provide emotional support, act as positive role models, and teach important social and life skills to foreign LGBT students.

In conclusion, Greenblatt (2004) maintains that it is critical for higher education professionals to recognize that international students who identify as LGBT face a triple dilemma. First, they must contend with being an international student on a campus full of predominantly American college students. Second, these students face heterosexism and homophobia in this country and among their fellow students on campus. Finally, these students must confront these same oppositional forces within their home nations. Greenblatt argues that it may be extremely challenging for these students to embrace all of their identities under these cumulative circumstances. As a result, Greenblatt urges all higher education professionals at every level to strive to be proactive allies for LGBT international students on the campuses across this nation.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed methods approach for gathering both quantitative and qualitative data in order to interpret and understand the experiences of LGBTQ students at the large Research I university where it was conducted—the University of Pittsburgh. Furthermore, this dissertation used a transformative paradigm to guide its development. According to Mertens (2010), a transformative paradigm strives to ensure social justice for potentially marginalized groups. Transformative paradigms also aim to facilitate positive social changes. In light of these characteristics, this dissertation may be characterized as a mixed methods study which is being guided by a transformative paradigm. As previously mentioned, tenets of Critical theory and Queer theory have also been used to guide the methodology of this study.

The first step of data collection for this dissertation involved the creation of an original pilot study survey in order to determine the feasibility of the undertaking. This first pilot study was completed during a directed research seminar. The procedures and findings of the Pilot I study are presented in section 3.1. The questions utilized in the first pilot survey can be viewed in Appendix A of this document.

The findings of the first pilot study were used to implement changes to the survey instrument which was utilized for gathering data for the second pilot study and ultimately the dissertation. A summary of the changes to the final survey which was disseminated for this study is presented in section 3.2 of this document. Appendix B exhibits the survey which was utilized

for the second pilot study as well as the dissertation study. Unlike the pilot studies, the final dissertation survey asked for students to enter their contact information if they desired to participate in further study regarding this topic involving a face-to-face interview.

### **3.1 THE PILOT I STUDY**

The aim of the first pilot survey was to ascertain whether further study pertaining to this topic would be feasible. It was also hoped to determine a general number for the possible participant pool of the study. Furthermore, the initial pilot study gauged the receptivity of potential subjects to participate in further, more comprehensive surveys or interviews. Most questions on the pilot study utilized five-point Likert scales ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The final survey used for this study also utilized this Likert scale.

A draft of the pilot survey was completed near the end of the 2014 spring term using the survey creation program Qualtrics. After suggestions for revisions were requested by the faculty advisor, an application to have the survey approved to be exempt by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was submitted. The IRB suggested various revisions to the survey. For example, the IRB suggested modifying a question on the survey which asked for the participant to indicate their country of origin. The IRB indicated that this might pose as an identifier and that it might be preferred to ask for country of origin *or* region of origin. Furthermore, for the open-ended final question of the survey asking the respondent for any comments or suggestions, the IRB advised to add a sentence asking participants to avoid providing any identifiable information.

The recruitment script for the first pilot study included the following:

Are you an International student who identifies as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning? If so, a Doctoral student in the School of Education is inviting you to take a brief survey regarding your experiences so far on the University of Pittsburgh's campus. If you are interested in taking the survey, please read the information below:

This recruitment script was also used for the final dissertation survey. The recruitment script was followed by a more detailed introductory script to the survey which was also approved by the IRB.

The detailed introductory script included the following:

You are being invited to participate in a research study at the University of Pittsburgh titled "LGBTQ International Student Pilot Study." The researcher aims to explore the experiences of International students on the university's campus who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ). You are invited to complete an online survey that should take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. Participation in this study involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects. This is an anonymous survey and your responses will be kept confidential. Participation is voluntary and you may skip a question if you do not want to respond to it. Participants must be age 18 or older and International students at the University of Pittsburgh. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact the principal investigator of this study, Philip Tarasi, at tarasi@pitt.edu. By clicking the link below, you are giving your consent to participate in the survey.

This was followed by the URL to the online Qualtrics survey along with a closing that indicated the principal investigator's name and credentials as a Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education Management. Once again, this introductory script was also used for the second pilot study and for the final dissertation survey with the omission of the word "pilot" for the final study.

After guidance from the faculty advisor as well as the IRB, the pilot study was exempt approved. The president of the campus's LGBTQ student organization agreed to assist in the dissemination of the survey. The president posted the information on the student organization's Facebook page and also asked the Office of International Students to post the recruitment script and URL in their June newsletter.

### **3.1.1 Implications for further proceedings**

A primary goal of the initial pilot study was to obtain information regarding the approximate number of other LGBTQ international students at the university whom the respondents knew. Answers to this exploratory question varied from zero to twenty students. The mean for this question was five while the median was three. The results of this question suggested that finding a sufficient sample size at the university to conduct a larger and more quantitative study might be a difficult task.

Overall, the experiences of the pilot study were quite beneficial for making final decisions regarding how to conduct a larger dissertation study. As mentioned, it was hoped that more students would complete a survey of this nature once they were on campus for the fall or spring term. The median age of participants (29) of the pilot study was somewhat surprising and it was not anticipated that all of the participants would be graduate students. A younger population comprised of more undergraduate students was expected. It was hoped that a wider array of students of different academic levels as well as different identities within the LGBTQ spectrum would participate in the final dissertation study.

Although the sample size for this initial pilot study was smaller than desired, important information was garnered from the undertaking. It was clear that some of these students were not open about their identities and/or felt unsafe on the university's campus. It was also apparent that some LGBTQ international students desired the creation of an association that specifically served their distinct needs. In particular, one student desired such a group in order to make friends in a setting where they did not feel like an "outsider." In conclusion, the initial pilot study indicated that further inquiry was necessary in order to explore the challenges that these students encounter

in their academic, social, and personal endeavors on campus. Hence, it was decided to continue examining this subject.

### **3.2 PILOT II PROCEEDINGS**

With the determination from the initial pilot study that further exploration of this topic was warranted at the University of Pittsburgh, proceedings for more thorough inquiry were developed. It was decided that both a survey and an interview would be employed in order to obtain a broader understanding of the experiences of this diverse, yet decidedly small subset of the quite large student population. The survey utilized for the second pilot study and for the final dissertation study was revised for a variety of reasons. Some revisions were made as a result of findings from the initial pilot study. Other revisions were made after consultation with faculty committee members as well as a group of doctoral candidate peers. Furthermore, some revisions were made as a result of additional review of the literature pertaining to this topic. It was hoped that these changes would expand the depth and breadth of the data obtained through the instrument.

The Pilot II survey was disseminated through various means over a three month period in the spring term of 2015. Four separate offices at the university disseminated the survey electronically through a variety of ways. The president of the campus's LGBTQ student organization posted the link to the survey on their Facebook and Twitter pages. The LGBTQ student organization also sent out the survey link in a weekly email newsletter from the last week of January until the first week of March. The director of the Office of International Students at the university also agreed to post the survey on a monthly newsletter that was sent to all international students at the university. This newsletter was sent in February and March of 2015. Furthermore,

the university's international programming coordinator sent out two emails in February and March respectively with the survey link. The international programming coordinator also posted the survey link on their separate Facebook pages for both undergraduate and graduate international students. This coordinator publicizes social and academic activities that might be of interest to international students. Furthermore, a campus organization that focuses on the health and wellness of LGBTQ campus community members also sent a link to the survey electronically. Finally, one faculty committee member disseminated the survey to students who were known to meet the criteria of the study.

### **3.2.1 Revisions to the instrument**

As aforementioned, a variety of revisions were made to the survey instrument after the initial pilot study was completed. The revised final survey which was utilized for this dissertation can be viewed in Appendix B of this document. The pilot survey had 15 questions while the final dissertation survey had 32 questions. It is clear that many revisions were made to the final survey. As mentioned, revisions were guided by faculty committee members as well as graduate student peers who reviewed the initial pilot survey and made various suggestions for improvement.

The first revisions involved adding questions at the beginning of the survey to collect more demographic information from the participants. For example, Question 2 was added to determine how long the student had been at the university. Question 3 was added to find which particular school at the university the respondent was enrolled in. Furthermore, Question 4 was inserted to determine the student's intended or declared major. In the newly added Question 5, participants were asked to indicate their current GPA.

These new demographic questions preceded a new section of the survey which aimed to determine the overall academic satisfaction of the participants. Determining the academic satisfaction of the students was ultimately deemed to be one of the primary goals of this study. For example, Question 6 of the final survey asked students to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement, “I am satisfied with my academic experience so far at the university.” In a similar vein, Question 7 asked for respondents to rate the statement, “The university is providing me with the skills that I will need to succeed after I graduate.”

Aside from academic satisfaction, it was decided to determine the participants’ overall satisfaction with the university in the final survey. Questions 20 and 21 were added to determine this factor. For example, Question 20 asked for students to rate the statement, “Overall, I am enjoying my time as a student at the university.” This question was followed by Question 21 which asked for participants to respond to the statement, “I would recommend this university to other individuals from my home country or region of origin.” It was hypothesized that these questions might be of particular interest to administrators of the university.

Another revision involved separating questions of the pilot survey regarding feelings of safety on campus into two questions examining two different variables for the final survey. The original question asked, “As an LGBTQ international student, I feel safe on the University’s campus.” After debate with the faculty advisor and other doctoral candidates, it was agreed to clarify this question by asking if the participant felt safe as an LGBTQ student in one question and as an International student in another. This change was implemented in order to better ascertain which factors specifically impacted the student’s feeling of safety on campus.

Question 14 of the final dissertation survey was added in order to learn more about the cultural background of the participant. In Question 14, respondents were asked, “It is acceptable

for LGBTQ individuals to be open about their LGBTQ identity in the culture of my native nation or region of origin.” This question was included in order to determine whether the culture of a participant’s homeland was accepting of LGBTQ individuals. It was hoped that this question may be used to interpret the following questions on the survey regarding whether the respondent was open about their LGBTQ identity to fellow international students as well as native born students.

Questions 17, 18, and 19 of the final survey were added after further review of literature pertaining to LGBTQ international students in this nation. Some of this literature indicated that these students may have various difficulties regarding public and personal health and wellness issues (Oba & Pope, 2013; Pope et al., 2007). As a result, Questions 17, 18, and 19 were utilized to explore these issues further. For example, Question 17 asked, “I am knowledgeable about safe ways to meet potential partners in the United States.” This question was also added as a direct response to a Pilot I survey comment regarding a student requesting a need for educational services regarding safe dating practices in the United States. Furthermore, Question 19 asked respondents to indicate whether, “I am knowledgeable about dating practices in the United States.” This question was also added in response to the comment on the Pilot I survey. Question 19 was also added due to an observation by Pope et al. (2007) regarding students potentially encountering new dating practices and gender roles upon their arrival in the United States. Finally, Question 18 was included to learn more about the sexual health of participants in light of literature suggesting that some LGBTQ international students might not be fully educated regarding safe sex procedures according to Pope and his colleagues. As a result, participants were asked to indicate whether, “I am knowledgeable about safe sex practices in the United States (i.e. ways to prevent sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancy).” This question may assist in determining the overall

health and well-being of participants as they navigate their way through a new culture and possibly a newly formed sexual orientation or gender identity.

In the final demographic section of the survey, a question regarding the religious affiliation of participants, Question 29, was added after consultation with the faculty advisor and a cohort of doctoral candidate peers. This question was suggested for addition in order to learn if participants identified with a particular religious affiliation and whether this had an impact on their experiences. Another aim was to determine if the participants had any religious affiliation at all as this was one of the options for the question.

Finally, Question 31 was revised in order to determine if a student would be willing to participate in further study regarding their experiences at the university. In Question 31, participants were asked, “Would you like to participate in further study regarding your experiences as an LGBTQ International student? (This may include an interview with the principal investigator of the study.)” Participants were asked to answer “Yes” or “No.” It was hoped that this question would be followed by a request for students to enter their contact information so that the principal investigator could reach out to them. However, the IRB official indicated that due to the potentially sensitive nature of this topic, any identifying information could not be submitted on the survey. As a result, the Pilot II survey asked for students who answered “Yes” regarding being open to an interview to contact the principal investigator of the study.

The IRB approved the initial pilot study and indicated that a new submission for the Pilot II survey was not necessary. Revisions to the final survey were submitted to the IRB as modifications to the previously approved study. All of these revisions were quickly approved by the IRB with the exception of a request for participants to submit contact information.

### **3.2.2 Results of the pilot II survey**

Thirty students completed the survey over the three months that it was publicized and promoted. Furthermore, three students contacted the principal investigator in order to participate in an interview. The majority of Pilot II survey participants were graduate students and half of the participants identified as gay on the LGBTQ spectrum. Furthermore, a majority of the participants indicated that they identified as male in terms of gender identity. The mean age of the respondent pool was 28.52 with a median of 29 and a mode of 30. When asked to indicate their home country or region of origin, 25 of the 30 participants chose to answer this question. China was the most common answer for this question with 5 students indicating that they hailed from this country. Three students indicated that they came from India. Two students from both Brazil and Taiwan also completed the survey. Furthermore, two students indicated that they came from the United Kingdom. One student from each of the following countries or regions also completed the survey: Belize, Belarus, Canada, Chile, France, Italy, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa, and Venezuela.

Overall, it appeared that most Pilot II participants were doing well academically at the university and were satisfied with their academic experience thus far at the institution. Furthermore, a majority of students indicated that they would recommend the university to others from their homeland or region of origin. Over half of the respondents believed that the university should offer more services specifically for LGBTQ international students.

The majority of students indicated that the university was a welcoming place for international students. A majority of participants also reported that the university was a welcoming place for LGBTQ students. However, it appeared that some students believed that the campus climate was slightly less welcoming for LGBTQ individuals than for international students. Likewise, the results suggested that students generally reported feeling slightly more respected as

international students than as LGBTQ students on campus. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the students indicated that they felt slightly safer as international students on campus than as LGBTQ students.

Participants reported a wide degree of variability regarding how accepting their countries or regions of origin were regarding LGBTQ identities. This may be related to the vast variability in responses regarding being open about their identities on campus. Generally, the results suggested that for those students who were out of the closet, they were slightly more open about their identities to U.S students than to fellow international students.

The vast majority of Pilot II participants were knowledgeable about safe sex practices. However, responses were more mixed regarding knowledge of safe ways to meet potential partners. Likewise, results were also mixed regarding knowledge of dating practices in the U.S.

Three themes were apparent in the open-ended comments section of the survey. First, some students indicated a need or desire for more services for LGBTQ international students on campus. Furthermore, some respondents made comments that expressed feelings of loneliness or isolation at the university. Finally, some participants spoke about the specific concerns and challenges for transgender students on campus.

### **3.2.3 Results of the pilot II interviews**

The previously mentioned three themes that were presented in the comments section of the Pilot II survey were also presented during the interview component of the second pilot study at various times by certain interviewees. As mentioned, three students chose to participate in an interview. The three interviewees for the Pilot II study were all graduate students and included a Latin American transgender woman, a Canadian gay male, and a Taiwanese gay male. It was apparent

from the three interviews, that the experiences of these students were quite varied depending on different personal factors. Overall, it appeared that all of the three interviewees were doing well academically at the university. Furthermore, all of them reported that they believed that the university was providing them with beneficial skills and that they were generally enjoying their time at the university.

Despite reporting relatively similar levels of academic satisfaction and success, it was clear that the experiences of these three individuals were also quite different due to a variety of factors related to their diverse backgrounds and varying degrees of openness regarding their identity. The Canadian gay male appeared to be adjusting well to life at the university but mentioned that he felt that the cultural climate of the city and the United States was more conservative than what he was accustomed to. The Latin American transgender woman was thrilled to be in a country that was more accepting of LGBTQ individuals. However, she expressed grievances with the university regarding the treatment of transgender individuals' bathroom and locker room use similar to those presented in the comments section of the survey. Finally, the Taiwanese gay male divulged that he was not out of the closet to anyone in the Western hemisphere. He expressed a certain degree of loneliness and isolation due to being in the closet.

All of the interviewees indicated that they believed that it would be beneficial for the university to provide more services specifically for LGBTQ international students. Furthermore, the majority of survey participants also agreed that the university should provide such services. In light of the survey and interview results of the Pilot II study, it was decided that it would be beneficial to attempt to recruit a larger group of participants for the final dissertation study in order to more comprehensively explore this topic.

### **3.3 DISSERTATION STUDY PROCEEDINGS**

The results of the two pilot studies indicated that a more thorough investigation of the experiences of LGBTQ international students at the university would be necessary in order to more extensively examine the lives of these individuals. It was decided that a more scientific approach would be taken in order to recruit participants for the final dissertation study. The Office of International Students at the university agreed to send out the script and survey via email by an honest broker in that office three times in the spring of 2016 to all international students (2,938) at the institution. The cooperation of an honest broker ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the results. After an initial blast, the script and survey were then sent out two weeks later for a second time. Two weeks after the second emailing, the script and survey were sent for a final time. A total of 69 students responded affirmatively and took the survey, which comprised a 2.35% response rate.

Another change to the final dissertation study pertained to the IRB granting permission for students to enter their contact information in order to be contacted to participate in the interview component of the study. A total of 19 students indicated they would agree to participate in a follow-up interview, out of which 13 students ultimately participated. After the final email was sent and time was allotted for students to complete the survey, the honest broker in the Office of International Students provided the results to the faculty advisor and principal investigator of this study. It was hoped that both of these methodological changes would result in a larger number of participants for both the survey and the interview.

### 3.3.1 Survey rationale

Table 3.1 presents the rationale for the organization of survey questions which were used for the final draft of the dissertation survey.

**Table 3.1: Survey Questions Rationale**

<b>Survey Question Numbers</b>	<b>Study Questions</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5	What are the academic demographics of the participants?	Institute of International Education (2015); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29	What are the personal demographics of the participants?	Institute of International Education (2015); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 6, 7, 20, 21, 22	How satisfied are the students with their academic experiences on the campus?	McClure (2007); Oba & Pope (2013); Rankin (2006); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13	What is the campus climate like for LGBTQ international students?	Brown et al. (2004); Rankin & Reason (2005); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 14, 15, 16	How open are LGBTQ international students regarding their identities on campus?	Greenblatt (2004); Oba & Pope (2013)
Questions 17, 18, 19	How do participants describe their knowledge regarding health and relationship issues?	Oba & Pope (2013); Pope et al. (2007)

The six primary study questions of the survey are exhibited in Table 3.1. These questions involved examining the following six factors: (1) the academic demographics of the participants, (2) the personal demographics of the participants, (3) how satisfied students were with their overall academic experience, (4) their assessment of the campus climate for LGBTQ international students, (5) how open they were regarding their identities, and (6) their knowledge of health and relationship issues.

Questions regarding the academic and personal demographics of the participants were determined to be crucial for understanding the participants in this study. Past research regarding LGBTQ students as well as international students in higher education in the U.S. has collected a wealth of important data (Institute of International Education, 2015; Rankin et al., 2010). It was hoped that demographic data previously collected by these researchers would be viewed in relation to that collected in the current study. Table 3.2 exhibits the survey questions pertaining to demographical data.

**Table 3.2: Academic and Personal Demographic Questions**

<b>Academic Demographic Questions</b>	
1.	What is your academic level?
2.	How many years have you been at the university?
3.	Which school or college are you enrolled in at the university?
4.	What is your intended or declared major?
5.	What is your current cumulative GPA?
<b>Personal Demographic Questions</b>	
23.	Approximately how many other LGBTQ international students do you know on campus?
24.	How would you describe your sexual identity?
25.	How would you describe your gender?
26.	What is your age?
27.	What is your home country or region of origin?
28.	How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?
29.	How would you describe your religious affiliation?

Survey questions exploring the satisfaction of participants with their overall academic experiences on campus were included in the final survey due to their importance in the comprehensive understanding of the experiences of these students. Various researchers have found that stress related to being an LGBT student on a predominantly heterosexual campus can lead to academic dissatisfaction and/or problems (Rankin, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010). Furthermore, a variety of researchers have also found that international students might confront more academic difficulties due to a myriad of factors including cultural differences and language barriers (McClure, 2007; Oba & Pope, 2013). As a result of all of these findings, it was determined that

examining the academic satisfaction of the participants was necessary. Table 3.3 presents survey questions concerning the satisfaction of participants regarding their overall academic experience at the university.

**Table 3.3: Academic Experience Satisfaction Survey Questions**

<b>Academic Satisfaction Questions</b>
1. I am satisfied with my academic experience so far at the university.
2. The university is providing me with the skills that I will need to succeed after I graduate.
20. Overall, I am enjoying my time as a student at the university.
21. I would recommend this university to other individuals from my home country/region.
22. The university should offer more services specifically for LGBTQ international students.

It was also established that some of the questions of the survey would be utilized to explore the campus climate for the participants. Various researchers have conducted campus climate studies for LGBT students in this nation and they have determined that many of these students report harassment, discrimination, and a less welcoming atmosphere for individuals of different identities on college campuses (Brown et al., 2004; Rankin & Reason, 2005; Rankin et al., 2010). The present survey aimed to determine how the participants of this study viewed the campus climate of this particular university. Questions pertaining to campus climate can be viewed in Table 3.4. Upon review of Table 3.4, it is clear that it was decided to ask separate questions in regards to a participant’s identity as an LGBTQ student or an international student respectively.

**Table 3.4: Campus Climate Assessment Survey Questions**

<b>Campus Climate Questions</b>
8. The university is a welcoming place for international students.
9. The university is a welcoming place for LGBTQ students.
10. As an international student, I feel respected on the university's campus.
11. As an LGBTQ student, I feel respected on the university's campus.
12. As an international student, I feel safe on the university's campus.
13. As an LGBTQ, I feel safe on the university's campus.

The survey also included questions examining how open the participants were regarding their identities on campus. This series of questions also aimed to understand how open and accepting the cultures of the homelands of the participants were regarding LGBTQ individuals. Researchers have found that LGBTQ international students often encounter difficulties regarding coming out on college campuses in the U.S. (Greenblatt, 2004; Oba & Pope, 2013). Questions exploring whether participants were having difficulties coming out were included due to findings from these studies. It was hypothesized that differences might be observed regarding coming out to native U.S. students versus fellow international students. Table 3.5 exhibits survey questions pertaining to the openness of participants regarding their identities.

**Table 3.5: Openness Regarding LGBTQ Identity Survey Questions**

<b>Openness Regarding Identity Questions</b>
14. It is acceptable for LGBTQ individuals to be open about their identity in the culture of my native nation or region of origin
15. I am open about my LGBTQ identity to other international students at the university.
16. I am open about my LGBTQ identity to U.S. students at the university.

Finally, it was determined that questions pertaining to personal health and relationship issues were crucial to thoroughly understanding the experiences of the participants. These questions concerned knowledge of dating and safe sex practices in the U.S. Researchers maintain that LGBTQ international students might not be fully aware of these factors (Oba & Pope, 2013;

Pope et al., 2007). As a result, the present study strove to explore whether participants at this university were knowledgeable regarding these highly important matters with the questions below.

**Table 3.6: Personal Health and Relationship Survey Questions**

<b>Health and Relationship Issues</b>
17. I am knowledgeable about safe ways to meet potential partners in the U.S.
18. I am knowledgeable about safe sex practices in the U.S. (i.e. ways to prevent sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancy).
19. I am knowledgeable about dating practices in the U.S.

### **3.3.2 Interview procedures**

As aforementioned, a series of interviews were planned to be held in order to gather more qualitative data regarding the experiences of participants who agreed to continue with the study. The rationale for using a qualitative approach for this segment of the study is based on the nature of the many questions listed on the Interview script which can be viewed in Appendix D of this document. It was decided that these questions may be best answered in an open-ended format as they were hoped to incite highly detailed descriptions of students' experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. It would be difficult to capture the nuances of interview questions with a quantitative method.

Interviews were recorded with the use of a digital audio recorder and were held in a private office on campus. The interview consent form can be viewed in Appendix C of this document. With the permission of the student, information collected and recorded was stored in a secure location in a private office on the university campus. All of the interviewees agreed to be audio-recorded and were informed that their interview would remain anonymous and confidential. They were also informed that audio recordings would be destroyed upon completion of this study. The

principal investigator also took notes during the recorded interview in order to facilitate the interpretation of data collected during the interviews. All interviews were transcribed immediately after the interviews in the same private office where the conversations took place. Eventually, common patterns and themes among the experiences and perceptions of the students were compiled and analyzed. Unique experiences for particular individuals were also recorded and analyzed.

The interview segment of this dissertation study is characterized as a qualitative form of research. Mertens (2010) indicates that in qualitative research, internal validity is known as *credibility* and external validity is labeled *transferability*. It was possible that language barriers might have contributed to a threat to the credibility of the study. Furthermore, as there was one interviewer for the study, another threat to credibility might have pertained to the subjectivity of the interviewer's perceptions. The interviewer strove to check in with participants periodically to verify findings and perceptions and to ensure that they were accurate and confirmable. In regards to threats to transferability, the parallel to external validity, it is clear that it might be difficult to make assumptions that the experiences of a somewhat small number of international LGBTQ students at one particular institution might be transferable to other situations across the country. However, it is hoped that information obtained and presented will enable the diverse audience of readers to learn about the experiences of these particular individuals and possibly use this information to promote and implement positive organizational and social changes on college and university campuses.

### 3.3.3 Interview rationale

Table 3.7 presents a rationale for the questions used in the interview script (Appendix D) for this component of the study. The table exhibits that the interview script was guided by the same six study questions that were utilized for the survey rationale. However, a seventh study question was utilized for the interview component pertaining to participants' experiences with living in the surrounding city of Pittsburgh as well as the nation.

**Table 3.7: Interview Script Rationale**

<b>Interview Question Numbers</b>	<b>Study Questions</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Questions 2, 3, 4, 5	What are the academic demographics of the participants?	Institute of International Education (2014); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12	What are the personal demographics of the participants?	Institute of International Education (2014); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 28, 42, 43, 44	How satisfied are the students with their academic experiences on the campus?	Rankin (2006); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 19, 20, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37	What is the campus climate like for LGBTQ international students?	Brown et al. (2004); Rankin & Reason (2005); Rankin et al. (2010)
Questions 25, 29, 30, 31	How open are LGBTQ international students regarding their identities on campus?	Greenblatt (2004); Oba & Pope (2013)
Questions 38, 39, 40, 41	How do participants describe their knowledge regarding health and relationship issues?	Oba & Pope (2013); Pope et al. (2007)
Questions 22, 23, 24, 26, 27	How would you describe your experience living in this city and nation?	Greenblatt (2004); Oba & Pope (2013)

The additional study question probing participants’ experiences in the city and the nation was suggested by committee members who were interested in examining this factor in addition to the other variables. Furthermore, various researchers maintain that cultural factors within the city or at the national level also impact the lives of LGBTQ international students on U.S. campuses (Greenblatt, 2004; Oba & Pope, 2013). For example, these researchers contend that LGBTQ international students continue to confront heterosexism and homophobia on a national level in this country despite recent advances for equality. Furthermore, Oba and Pope (2013) maintain that cultural differences, language barriers, and ethnic or racial marginalization in LGBT communities within the U.S. can impact the experiences of international students.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Table 3.8 presents the seven primary questions which were utilized to guide the creation of the survey and the interview script. These primary study questions will also be utilized to guide the data analysis of this study.

**Table 3.8: Primary Study Questions**

<b>Primary Study Questions</b>
1. What are the academic demographics of the participants?
2. What are the personal demographics of the participants?
3. How satisfied are the students with their academic experiences on the campus?
4. What is the campus climate like for LGBTQ international students?
5. How open are LGBTQ international students regarding their identities on campus?
6. How do participants describe their knowledge regarding health and relationship issues?
7. How do participants describe their experiences living in this city and nation?

The survey was created with Qualtrics software and this package will also be employed to interpret and present the survey results in Chapter 4 of this document. As mentioned, this case study of a

large Research I institution utilized a mixed-methods approach to collecting data. Quantitative data from the survey is interpreted and presented in the next chapter of this document. The data is exhibited in separate sections pertaining to the factors which were examined by the primary questions of this study: (1) academic demographics, (2) personal demographics, (3) academic satisfaction, (4) campus climate, (5) openness regarding identity, and (6) knowledge of health and relationship issues.

Qualitative data from the face-to-face interviews was also analyzed by organizing responses in relation to the factors which were deemed to be important by the primary study questions. The qualitative data from the interviews as well as the qualitative data from the open-ended survey comments were also analyzed utilizing a process known as coding and chunking whereby emergent themes and patterns are scrutinized in order to make observations or generalizations. Mertens (2010) maintains that chunking and coding data into logical categories is a highly effective way to analyze qualitative data. These findings were compiled and are presented and interpreted in the following chapters.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Sixty-nine students completed the survey over the approximate six weeks that it was distributed. Some students opted to not answer particular questions. Three individuals opened the survey but did not leave any responses. The majority of participants were graduate students (n = 48) and a majority of the participants identified as bisexual (n = 28) on the LGBTQ spectrum. Furthermore, a majority of the participants indicated that they identified as female (n = 36) in terms of gender identity. The mean age of the respondent pool was 25.02 with a median of 24 and modes of 24 and 20.

The first section of this chapter presents the demographic data from the survey. This section is followed by a presentation of the participants' assessments of their experiences on campus. The subsequent section summarizes findings regarding the campus climate for LGBTQ students as well as international students. This is followed by a section examining the openness of participants regarding their LGBTQ identity on campus. Furthermore, a section regarding findings related to health and personal relationship issues for the participants is presented. The open-ended comments submitted in the survey are subsequently examined. Finally, findings regarding the interview component of the study are exhibited.

## **4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**

Many different forms of demographic data were collected from the participants of this survey. Demographic data that is academic in nature is presented in the first subsection of this segment. This information is followed by a subsection exhibiting personal demographic information such as sexual identity, gender identity, racial or ethnic background, and religious affiliation.

### **4.1.1 Academic demographic data**

In terms of the academic level of participants, 48 indicated that they were graduate students while 18 indicated that they were undergraduate students. Three students indicated that they were enrolled in professional schools, such as the School of Law or the School of Medicine.

Question 2 asked students to indicate how many years they attended the university. Most participants indicated that they were at the university for less than 1 year ( $n = 32$ ). Sixteen of the students stated that they were at the institution between 1 and 2 years. Furthermore, nine of the students were at the university for four or more years. Six students indicated that they attended the university between 3 and 4 years. The smallest number of respondents ( $n = 5$ ) attended the institution between 2 and 3 years.

Question 3 of the survey asked respondents to indicate which school or college they were enrolled in at the university. Sixty-seven students divulged which school they were enrolled in. The majority of respondents ( $n = 27$ ) indicated that they were enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences at the university. The second largest group of students ( $n = 18$ ) attended the School of Engineering. Six of the participants were enrolled in the School of Information Science and another six were in the College of Business. Three students attended the School of Public Health. Two

students each attended either the Schools of Education, Pharmacy, or Public and International Affairs respectively. Finally, one student each reported that they were enrolled in one of the following three schools respectively: Health and Rehabilitation Science, Law, or Medicine. None of the respondents were enrolled in the other remaining Schools at the university including Dental Medicine, General Studies, Nursing, and Social Work. The intended or declared majors of the respondents were quite varied and spanned many of the previously mentioned schools at the university. Fifty-eight students divulged their majors on the survey.

When asked about their current cumulative GPA (Grade Point Average) in Question 5, a majority of respondents (n = 44) indicated that they had a 3.50 or above. Seventeen participants had a GPA between 3.00 and 3.49. Four students had a GPA between 2.50 and 2.99. Two of the students did not have a calculated GPA at the time of completing the survey. Finally, two participants chose to not answer this question.

#### **4.1.2 Personal demographic data**

As mentioned, the mean age of survey participants was 25.02 with a median of 24 and modes of 24 and 20. When asked to describe their sexual identity, the largest number of respondents (n = 28) indicated that they identified as bisexual. Nineteen of the respondents indicated that they identified as gay. Seven participants identified as questioning and one participant identified as queer. Five respondents indicated that they identified as a lesbian. Finally, six respondents indicated “Other” as their sexual identity. Four of the participants who indicated “Other” specified their sexual identity as follows: heterosexuality, straight, heterosex, and Pansexual. It should be noted that transgender individuals may identify as heterosexual (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011).

Furthermore, pansexual individuals are individuals who can be attracted to any individual of any gender and/or any sexual identity (Gonel, 2013).

In terms of gender identity, the majority of respondents (n = 36) indicated that they identified as female. Twenty-eight participants identified as male. One participant identified as questioning. Furthermore, one participant identified as transgender.

When asked to indicate their home country or region of origin, 58 participants chose to answer this question. China was the most common answer for this question with 27 students indicating that they hailed from this country. Four students reported that they were from Brazil. Three students were from Taiwan while another three individuals were from Thailand. Two students each reported they were from either Columbia, India, or Vietnam respectively. One student each indicated that they were from one of the following countries: Argentina, Belarus, Costa Rica, England, France, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. Three students chose to divulge a geographic area instead of a particular country that they came from. These reported areas included East Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East.

In Question 28, students were asked to describe their racial and/or ethnic background. The majority of the respondents (n = 43) identified as Asian or Pacific Islander. Ten participants identified as White or Caucasian. Seven participants identified as Latino or Hispanic. Three respondents described their identity as Middle Eastern. Finally, one student indicated that they identified with more than one race or ethnicity. None of the respondents identified as African or Black, Native American, or Other.

In terms of religious affiliation, the majority of respondents (n = 31) indicated that they had no religious affiliation. Twelve of the participants identified as Buddhist. Eight individuals

identified as Atheist. Another eight students identified as Christians. Three Christians opted to specify that they were Catholic and one Christian specified their denomination as Spiritism. Four participants indicated that their religious affiliation was Islam. One student identified as Hindu. Finally, one student identified as “Other” and specified this choice as “Spiritual.”

When participants were asked to indicate the approximate number of LGBTQ international students whom they knew on campus, 66 students chose to answer this question. The most common answer for this question (mode) was zero. The median answer was 2 and the mean answer to this question was 2.34. One student indicated that they knew 20 other LGBTQ international students and another student indicated that they knew 10 other such students. Overall, the number of fellow LGBTQ international students that were known to respondents was quite varied. Some knew considerably more of their peers than others. However, the majority of participants generally did not know a significant number of similar peers and zero was the most commonly reported number. It should be noted that one participant did not give an exact number as an answer and entered “more than 100” for this question. It was decided to omit this answer from mean calculations because this was not an exact number and because it was significantly different from all other responses. It was hypothesized that this student might have given their estimate of the total number of LGBTQ international students at the university.

## **4.2 SATISFACTION WITH ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES**

The following section presents findings regarding satisfaction with academic and personal experiences of the students on campus. When asked to rate the statement, “I am satisfied with my academic experience so far at the university,” the majority of respondents (n = 58) indicated that

they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Seven students submitted a neutral stance. Finally, one student disagreed and another student strongly disagreed with this statement.

Participants were also asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement, “The university is providing me with the skills that I will need to succeed after I graduate.” The majority of respondents (n = 54) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Nine students were neutral. Three students disagreed with this statement and one student strongly disagreed.

Question 20 examined the participants’ overall enjoyment as a student on campus. Participants were asked to rate the statement, “Overall, I am enjoying my time as a student at the university.” The majority of students (n = 58) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Five students were neutral regarding their overall enjoyment. One student disagreed with the statement and another student strongly disagreed with it.

In Question 21, students were asked whether they would recommend the university to other individuals from their home country or region of origin. A majority of respondents (n = 58) indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Three respondents were neutral. Two students disagreed while another two students strongly disagreed with the statement. Overall, the majority of survey respondents appeared to be satisfied with their academic experiences at the university.

Question 22 asked students to indicate whether they agreed with the statement, “The university should offer more services specifically for LGBTQ international students.” The largest number of respondents (n = 48) strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. Thirteen students indicated a neutral response. Three students disagreed with the statement while one student strongly disagreed with it.

### 4.3 CAMPUS CLIMATE RESULTS

The following section presents findings regarding survey questions which aimed to explore the campus climate for LGBTQ international students at the university. As mentioned, previous campus climate studies focusing on LGBTQ students in the U.S have found that these student may experience higher levels of harassment and alienation and may report less favorable ratings regarding the climate of the campus (Rankin et al., 2010). The present study strove to examine factors related to the campus climate assessments of LGBTQ students who were also international students.

First and foremost, Question 8 asked students whether they agreed with the following statement, “The university is a welcoming place for international students.” The majority of students (n = 52) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Eight students were neutral regarding this statement. Seven respondents disagreed with this statement. Overall, the findings reveal that the majority of respondents believed that the institution is a welcoming place for international students.

Subsequently, Question 9 asked students to indicate whether they agreed with the statement, “The university is a welcoming place for LGBTQ students.” Results were somewhat less affirmative for this question than they were for the previous question. Although a majority of participants (n = 32) agreed or strongly agreed, a large number of respondents (n = 29) were neutral regarding this statement. Six participants disagreed with the statement. When analyzing these corresponding questions, it appears that participants reported that the campus was more welcoming for international students than it was for LGBTQ students.

Question 10 of the survey asked students to indicate whether they agreed with the statement, “As an international student, I feel respected on the university’s campus.” The largest

number of students (n = 52) agreed or strongly with this statement. Nine students reported a neutral stance. Three students disagreed with the statement and one student strongly disagreed with it.

Question 11 asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed with the statement, “As an LGBTQ student, I feel respected on the university’s campus.” The greatest number of students (n = 31) indicated that they were neutral regarding this statement. Thirty students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Six students disagreed with the statement. Similar to the findings regarding whether the campus is welcoming, it appears that participants generally felt more respected as international students on campus than as LGBTQ students.

The following two survey questions strove to examine whether students felt safe on the university’s campus. Question 12 asked students to rate the statement, “As an international student, I feel safe on the university’s campus.” The majority of students (n = 60) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Six participants were neutral and one student disagreed with this statement.

Results were somewhat less positive when students were asked whether they felt safe as LGBTQ students on campus. Although 43 students agreed or strongly agreed, twenty students indicated a neutral response. Finally, three participants disagreed with the statement.

Overall, participants generally responded more affirmatively pertaining to being an international student on campus than to being an LGBTQ pupil. Larger numbers of students provided neutral responses pertaining to feeling welcomed, respected, or safe on campus in regards to their LGBTQ status. Survey findings regarding the campus climate as well as the health and relationship factors examined in this study are presented in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Survey Findings**

<b>Campus Climate Factors</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither Agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Welcoming for International Students	22 33%	30 45%	8 12%	7 10%	0 0%
Respected as an International Student	13 20%	39 60%	9 14%	3 5%	1 2%
Felt Safe as an International Student	26 39%	34 51%	6 9%	1 1%	0 0%
Welcoming for LGBTQ Students	7 10%	25 37%	29 43%	6 9%	0 0%
Respected as an LGBTQ Student	5 7%	25 37%	31 46%	6 9%	0 0%
Felt Safe as an LGBTQ Student	13 20%	30 45%	20 30%	3 5%	0 0%
<b>Health and Relationship Factors</b>					
Knowledgeable About Safe Sex	32 49%	26 40%	3 5%	3 5%	1 2%
Knowledgeable About Safe Ways to Meet	9 14%	22 33%	16 24%	12 18%	7 11%
Knowledgeable About US Dating Customs	7 11%	24 36%	19 29%	15 23%	1 2%

#### **4.4 OPENNESS REGARDING IDENTITY ON CAMPUS**

As mentioned, researchers have found that LGBTQ international students may be less likely to be open about their identities on campuses in comparison to their U.S. counterparts (Oba & Pope, 2013). The following survey questions aimed to explore how open participants were regarding their identities at the university. The first question in this series intended to determine how acceptable it was for LGBTQ individuals to be open about their identities in the cultures of their homelands. As aforementioned, many international students may be hailing from areas where their identities are significantly frowned upon or even illegal (Greenblatt, 2004). Question 14 intended to explore this factor in participants. The question asked students to indicate whether they agreed with the statement, “It is acceptable for LGBTQ individuals to be open about their LGBTQ identity in the culture of my native nation or region of origin.” The majority of students (n = 32) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Twenty students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Fifteen students were neutral. It is apparent from these results that the participants of

this study hailed from very diverse areas with a wide variability of acceptance of LGBTQ individuals

Question 15 strove to determine if the participants of the study were open about their identities to other international students on campus. The question asked students to rate the following statement, “I am open about my LGBTQ identity to other international students at the university.” The largest number of participants (n = 29) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Twenty-four participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Thirteen students were neutral regarding this topic. It is apparent that these results were quite variable.

Results were also highly variable when the students were asked whether they were open about their LGBTQ identities to U.S. students at the university. The greatest number of students (n = 30) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement pertaining to being open to other U.S. students. Twenty students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Fifteen participants reported a neutral stance.

There was a wide degree of variability regarding whether participants’ native lands were accepting of LGTBQ individuals. There was also a high degree of variability regarding how open each student was to other international students as well as to U.S. students. It is presumed that the wide degree of variability regarding LGBTQ acceptance in the homelands of participants might be related to the high variability pertaining to how open students were about their identities.

#### **4.5 HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIP ISSUES**

As previously mentioned, researchers have found that some LGBTQ international students might not have a thorough understanding of dating practices as well as safe ways to meet potential

partners in the U.S. (Oba & Pope, 2013). Furthermore, Pope et al. (2007) found that this student population may be less knowledgeable about safe sex practices. The following survey questions aimed to examine these issues in the lives of the participants. As mentioned, these survey findings are presented in Table 4.1.

Question 17 asked students to rate the statement, “I am knowledgeable about safe ways to meet potential partners in the United States.” The largest number of respondents (n = 31) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Nineteen students disagreed or strongly disagreed. Sixteen participants were neutral regarding this statement. These results suggest a somewhat wide array of variability regarding whether participants were knowledgeable about safe ways to meet partners in the U.S.

Question 18 asked students to rate the statement, “I am knowledgeable about safe sex practices in the United States (i.e. ways to prevent sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancy).” The majority of students (n = 58) either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. However, three students were neutral and four students disagreed or strongly disagreed. Although the majority of respondents indicated that they agreed with this statement, it should be noted that some students indicated that they were not knowledgeable or neutral, presumably not entirely certain, about safe sex practices.

Finally, Question 19 prompted students to indicate whether they were knowledgeable about dating practices in the United States. The majority of participants (n = 31) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Nineteen participants were neutral for this question. Sixteen students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Similar to the previous question regarding knowing safe ways to meet potential partners, these results suggested a somewhat wide array of

variability within participants regarding being knowledgeable about dating practices in the U.S. These findings will be examined in further detail in forthcoming sections

#### **4.6 OPEN-ENDED SURVEY COMMENTS**

At the end of the survey, students were asked to potentially submit open-ended comments regarding their experiences in order to possibly examine more qualitative data pertaining to their lives on campus. Question 30 asked students to voluntarily respond to the following question, “If you would like to make any comments regarding the campus climate for LGBTQ international students and/or suggest any changes for the university to implement, please use the space below. Please do not provide any identifiable information. Thank you.” Ten participants chose to write comments in this section. These ten participants have been given codes which are presented in this section. Three themes appeared to emerge in the comments including: (1) a desire for more campus events for this population, (2) a desire for more resources for this population, and (3) difficulties with homophobia on campus.

Three students made comments expressing a desire for more university-sponsored events for LGBTQ international students. For example, one student wished “more events [were held] for us to recognize more gay friends on campus and share [our] story with each other” (S07-30). Another student stated, “Make more social events for LGBT people to meet each other in campus” (S05-30). Furthermore, another student (S09) called for LGBTQ “friendly” activities on campus but stipulated that they should be open to all students regardless of sexual and/or gender identity in order to facilitate a “more open minded society” on campus.

Four students presented a desire for more resources on campus in order to meet their specific needs. For example, one student stated:

Right now, I think since the majority of the students are straight, I feel really afraid that other people might know my identity. I once [had a] problem about my sexual orientation, worrying about my future, being confused about myself, etc. Sometime[s] I just need someone to talk to. I suggest the university should provide some kind of one-on-one mentor program on leading the LGBTQ students towards a positive way. (S03-30)

In this statement, the participant is explicitly appealing for a mentoring program at the university in order to facilitate their adjustment to a heteronormative campus. Another student expressed a desire to be introduced to possible LGBTQ resources or organizations during their orientation to the university. This student stated, “I don't remember if any introduction to the university affairs for LGBTQ or LGBT groups on the Orientation Day [was] offered in our first week on campus. Since we come from different countries, with different cultures and different levels of LGBTQ acceptance, it'd be very good to be introduced in the first week at the university to those resources” (S02-30). Furthermore, one student expressed a grievance with the lack of resources or organizations for LGBTQ international students, and graduate students in particular. This student commented, “There are no graduate-level LGBTQ student organizations. The school doesn't seem to care [about] the campus social environment for international LGBTQ students. What can be done to improve this situation? At the graduate or professional-level, I do not know” (S08-30). Finally, one student (S-06) entered a question wondering if there were any LGBTQ organizations or clubs for international students. This student proceeded to say that it was difficult to locate this information. It is apparent from all of these comments that there is a request for more resources and/or organizations for LGBTQ international students. Furthermore, active promotion of these events and organizations should be undertaken if and when they are initiated.

Four of the participants made comments that exhibited difficulties pertaining to encountering and handling homophobia and harassment on campus. One student (S-03) previously mentioned a fear that other students on the heterosexual-majority campus might find out about their identity. Another student indicated a fear to express their sexual orientation due to a perceived more conservative climate in the city of Pittsburgh where the campus is located. This student stated:

I moved from [a major Northeastern U.S. city] to Pittsburgh and found that Christianity is pretty dominant here. I dare not tell my Christian friends about my actual sexual orientation. For those whose religions do not have a problem with homosexuality, I feel open and safe about discussing this issue but not for those that do. In general, since I mainly study and work in my own school, I can't really tell how the campus climate [is] for LGBTQ international students. (S04-30)

Furthermore, one student indicated having significant difficulties with discrimination and harassment on campus. The student made a critical comment pertaining to the campus climate by stating:

The campus climate is far from accepting the LGBTQ students in general, and the international LGBTQ students in particular. Multiple layers of discrimination combined with bullying-mobbing and workplace harassment are unfortunately seen. . . By the way, I prefer my answers to be "completely confidential," because I'm already experiencing difficulties in this university, and I don't want more of these. (S08-30)

Finally, another student also made criticisms of the campus environment by indicating that one of their American professors made "very inappropriate comments about LGBTQ students in their graduate seminars" (S10-30). Furthermore, this student stated:

A [graduate] student . . . from [Africa] . . . has [been] consistently making homophobic comments regarding gay/lesbian staff members [to] his own students, and fellow graduate students including myself. How ridiculous is this?! International students in general need to be told about LGBTQ right[s] in this country! There is a lot of work that needs to be done regarding the LGBTQ international students on Pitt campus. (S10-30)

The comments made by this particular student present a variety of issues of concern. First, the student indicated that an American professor made homophobic comments. Furthermore, this

participant claimed that a fellow international student was also making homophobic comments. Greenblatt (2004) maintains that LGBTQ international students potentially encounter homophobia and harassment interacting with both American as well as international individuals on college campuses. The comments made by this student regarding negative experiences might reflect Greenblatt's findings pertaining to the possibility of experiencing dual discrimination from both U.S. residents as well as international individuals in academia in this nation. It should be noted that homosexuality is illegal and extremely frowned upon culturally in many parts of Africa according to the LGBT legal rights monitoring organization Equaldex ([www.equaldex.com](http://www.equaldex.com)).

#### **4.7 RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS**

On the survey, 19 students indicated that they would be willing to participate in an interview. These students entered their contact information on the final question of the survey. They were contacted up to three times via email in order to inquire if they were willing to participate in an interview. Thirteen of the 19 students indicated that they would like to complete an interview. The interview questions were IRB approved and are presented in Appendix D of this document. As mentioned, the interview component of this study strove to gather more qualitative data regarding the experiences of these students on the campus, within the city, and within the U.S. in general. Some of the questions delved into more personal matters pertaining to issues such as interpersonal relationships which were not evaluated in the survey. Interviews were held in a private office on the university's campus and all 13 participants agreed to be audio-recorded during the interviews with a digital audio-recorder. The average time for the interviews was 30 minutes. The shortest interview was 20 minutes and the longest interview spanned one hour.

All of the 13 students who participated in an interview were graduate students, either at the Master's or Doctoral level. Ten of the interviewees identified as gay males. Two of the interview participants identified as bisexual females. Finally, one participant was a male who identified as Q for questioning. Eight of the interviewees hailed from China. The Chinese students included five gay males, two bisexual females, and a questioning male. One gay male participant was from a Southeast Asian nation and another was from a Middle Eastern country. Finally, three gay male participants were from three different countries in Latin America. The interviewees ranged in age between 22 and 32. The mean age was 26 and the mode age was 24 for the participants.

The majority of the interviewees, eight students, were in their first year of enrollment at the university at the time of their interviews. All of the students reported that they were doing well at the university. In fact, all of the interviewees had GPA's well above a 3.00. The mean GPA of the group of interviewees was 3.76 with modes of 3.40 and 4.00.

The areas of study of the 13 interviewees were quite diverse. As mentioned, all of the interviewees were at the graduate level at the university. Five of the participants were enrolled in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Four interviewees were enrolled in the Graduate School of Engineering. Two interviewees were enrolled in the Graduate School of Business. Finally, another two students attended the Graduate School of Public Health. All interviewees have been given codes which can be viewed in the forthcoming sections.

Eight of the interviewees identified their race or ethnicity as Asian and one identified as Chinese. Two of the interviewees identified as Hispanic and one participant indicated that he identified as Latino. Finally, one participant identified as White.

The religious affiliations of the interviewees were quite varied. Four of the students indicated that they did not have a religious affiliation. Two students identified as Christian. One

student identified as Buddhist. One student was undecided as to whether they identified as Buddhist or Daoist. Another student said that they were “Buddhist, sort of.” Furthermore, another student indicated that they were Atheist. Finally, one student stated that they identified as “Muslim but secular.”

Seven of the interviewees indicated that they were single. Six of the students indicated that they were in a relationship or partnered. One Latin American student was married to an American college student. Another Latin American student said that he had been partnered for three months. One Chinese participant indicated that he had an American boyfriend who was a student at the university. Another Chinese student stated that he also had an American boyfriend who just completed graduate school. Furthermore, one Chinese interviewee indicated that he was in a long distance relationship with a boyfriend in China. Finally, a Chinese female participant said that she had a Chinese national boyfriend. She also divulged that she is open about her bisexual identity with him.

According to Equaldex, the LGBT legal rights global monitoring organization, the countries which the 13 participants hailed from have varied levels of acceptance of LGBT individuals. In China, where eight of the interviewees came from, homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997 and declassified as a mental illness in 2001. Same-sex marriage is illegal in China and there are no legal protections against discrimination in the country. According to Equaldex, the Chinese government has largely remained silent pertaining to issues regarding the rights of LGBT individuals. Similar to China, the Middle Eastern country where one participant hailed from does not approve same-sex marriage and there are no legal protections for LGBT individuals. Public opinion is often quite vehemently opposed to homosexuality in this region according to Equaldex. In contrast to China and the Middle East, two Latin American participants

came from nations that have legalized same-sex marriage and there are some legal protections against discrimination. In the remaining Latin American country and in the Southeast Asian country, same-sex marriage is not legal. However, there are some legal protections for LGBT people in these nations. It is apparent that the interviewees came from diverse regions with a high degree of variability regarding legality and acceptance. The following sections present findings from the 13 interviews and exhibit how individuals coming from a diverse array of regions describe their experiences at an institution of higher education in the United States.

#### **4.7.1 Reasons for coming to the institution**

Interviewees provided a variety of reasons regarding why they decided to come to the university. Eight participants indicated that they chose the university due to its prestigious reputation, respected professors, and/or regarded curriculum. Two interviewees indicated that they liked the city of Pittsburgh where the campus is located and this impacted their choice. One Chinese student indicated that the more liberal environment in the United States affected his choice. This student stated:

I was accepted by four universities. One was in Hong Kong and three were in the United States. I think the Hong Kong one is better, but I think I prefer to live in an environment that is just more liberal so I chose to come to the United States. And among the three other universities, this university is the best. (I06-12)

Three international interviewees actively sought to work with specific individuals at this university. For example, one Latin American participant indicated that he heard about an advisor at the university who was working on projects that interested him. A Ph.D. candidate from the University of Pittsburgh gave a lecture at his institution in his country and spoke of this professor. Consequently, he reached out to this professor, and the professor asked him to come and study

under him. Another student, a Chinese male, decided to come to this particular university to work with his advisor who is world-renowned for his scholarly work. When he was asked why he chose to attend this university, he stated:

My advisor, basically. When I was attending a conference in London, at a university in London, I went to the library there and found a book written by my advisor. And a year later, I became his last student before he retires. And when I came over here, I found out he's gay too, which is really cool. He's very well-known in [his field], and that's the main reason I came here. (IS05-12)

Similar to this student, another Latin American participant opted to come to the university due to the work and reputation of a specific professor. This student answered:

There are not too many programs in the U.S. and I decided to come to this city because, number one, I wanted to study LGBT literature and gender and sexuality studies. And one of the main professors who [is] from this university, he is an expert in [his field of] literature related to sexual orientation and gay issues. So, he was here, so it was good to work with him. I'm writing my dissertation with him. And this program at this university is one of the best in the United States. (IS11-12)

This Latin American student also mentioned that another main reason why he chose to attend the institution was that his husband was accepted to be a student at the university. He said that it was “a combination of interests that made it possible” (IS11-12).

#### **4.7.2 Satisfaction with academic experiences**

When asked how they were doing academically at the university, the majority of participants, 11 students, provided an affirmative answer and indicated that they were doing well so far at the institution. One Chinese student who previously studied in Europe indicated that he had some difficulties when he stated:

I had some trouble when I first came here. But then again, everyone can struggle when you first come here. Graduate programs here are different from the European system. Here, you have to read a lot. In the European system, you go into depth on one topic. Here, you need

to know everything. So that made me open to new disciplinary endeavors here, which is good. (IS05-13)

Although this student initially had some obstacles, it appeared that he was more positive about his experiences at the time of his interview. In contrast, the Middle Eastern student provided a decidedly negative answer to this question. He stated, “I’m not satisfied. I’m deciding to switch to a Master’s from a Ph.D. program so I’m graduating sooner” (IS13-13).

When participants were asked if they felt that they were obtaining the skills that they will need to succeed upon graduation, 11 of the 13 interviewees gave affirmative answers. Two interviewees responded with “No” to this question. The two participants who responded negatively included a Latin American student and the Middle Eastern student. The Latin American student elaborated on his negative answer when he stated:

No, to be honest. I don’t think I’m getting it because the humanities is a lost field, a field that is dead. It is a really good program but usually when you want to find a job, you need to at least teach a language. And all those things we need to have like the philosophy of teaching . . . and creating a syllabus, having a teaching portfolio. All those things that are essential to entering the work world, professors don’t help with that. So, in other words, I don’t feel that I have the advice to go to the job market. The advice to go to the job market is outdated. It is from ten years ago. (IS11-14)

Furthermore, when students were asked what their academic goals were for their time at the university, most students indicated that they wanted to do well in their courses and successfully complete milestones such as dissertations. Four students indicated that they wanted to find a job. One Latin American student expressed some dissatisfaction with not being able to find an internship in his intended field. He said that it appeared that internships tended to be awarded to American students instead of international students in his opinion. Finally, the Middle Eastern student indicated, “I just want to write the thesis and leave. I will defend the thesis of course and I will leave academia entirely” (IS13-15).

When the interviewees were asked if they were satisfied with their experience so far at the university, nine students gave affirmative answers to the question. The Middle Eastern student said, “Completely no” (IS13-16). Three students gave mixed answers. One Chinese male (IS04) said that he was “not 100% satisfied” with his academic performance so far but that things were not going terribly. The Chinese male who studied in Europe before attending this institution gave a mixed answer as well. He said that he was satisfied academically so far, but not on a personal level. He stated:

Academically, yes. On a personal level, no. Graduate students are somewhat isolated from student clubs here, which is very odd from my past experiences. In Europe, clubs and societies are run by mixed leadership of graduate students and undergraduate students. I guess here, graduate students are considered to be cheap labor. There are faculty, and less-paid faculty, which are graduate students. So we have to teach undergrad courses more often. Maybe that’s why they divide grad and undergrad students. But in Europe, if you are a graduate student, you are still a student and clubs are integrated. (IS05-16)

Another Chinese male provided an answer with a similar sentiment regarding positive academic experiences but somewhat negative social experiences. He answered, “Academically, yes. But I feel, I’m not sure if because I’m a graduate student, but I feel less involved than as an undergrad. I have less international friends” (IS08-16).

In Question 17 of the interview, students were asked what they liked about the university. Six students indicated that they liked the professors. Terms such as kind, supportive, and responsive were used to describe the faculty. Four students also mentioned that they liked their fellow students. In particular, they liked the diversity among fellow graduate students. For example, one Chinese male noted:

It’s well mixed. We have students from different parts of the United States and different parts of the world. It’s really a place to learn about the melting pot experience of this culture. And this city is rated one of the most livable cities in this country. There’s the cultural side with the all of the museums. And then, of course, there’s the world-class sports teams. (IS03-17)

This particular student also mentioned his fondness for the city of Pittsburgh. Two other students also indicated that they liked the city. Furthermore, two students maintained that they liked the infrastructure of the campus and its buildings. Both of these students also mentioned that they liked the campus library. Finally, one Chinese male said, “I think I like that it is liberal and it’s quite beautiful” (IS06-17).

When asked what they disliked about the university, five students indicated that they disliked nothing. One of the Chinese females said that she did not like the cold winters. The other Chinese female (IS02) said that she did not like “the pretty conservative” atmosphere in Pittsburgh in relation to the city where she completed her undergraduate degree. One Chinese male (IS06) said that he felt that some parts of the city were “not good looking” and that left a bad impression on him. A Latin American student indicated that he was expecting cleaner and higher quality computers and lab facilities than what he encountered at the university. Another Latin American student (IS09) complained that some of his professors “don’t have any teaching skills.” Furthermore, one Chinese male (IS08) said that he felt “less involved” at the university than he desired.

Some students expressed extensive sentiments regarding what they disliked about the university, and their academic departments in particular. For example, one Chinese student (IS05) maintained:

The isolation of graduate students, from both the faculty and the undergraduate students. The other thing would be the bureaucracy. A complaint was made against a man in my department who made very inappropriate sexual comments and intolerant comments of his own students but it was overlooked because he was friends with a chair in my department. He was a total bully. (IS05-18)

A Latin American student presented mixed feelings about his experiences at the university when he stated:

I mean, it's kind of complicated for me, because the things that I could talk about disliking are part of my department because that is the reality of being a grad student. As a grad student, I don't have a relationship with any other departments outside of my department. So I mean, the only other department besides my own that I have any interactions with is the Office of International Students. And my experience with them has been good. As far as negatives about my department, maybe my department is not updated regarding the realities of the market and the demand of students getting a [graduate degree]. And also what I also dislike is definitely mentoring in the department. It is a really good program with really nice people, but you don't get the mentoring, the following-up process as a grad student. Maybe at smaller campuses, advisors have more time to give you advice regarding that. That is maybe not the case here. (IS11-18)

His answer was mixed with critical as well as positive remarks regarding his department. He also commended the Office of International Students at the university. Finally, the Middle Eastern student indicated that he was asked to change his graduate program degree in his department by his advisor. He also indicated that his experience as a graduate student and an instructor has been quite negative for him. He said, "I was subjected to bullying, mobbing, and workplace harassment" (IS13-18). This student also reiterated that he felt as if he was forced to change his graduate degree plan of study, much to his dismay.

In Question 21 of the interview, participants were asked if they would recommend the university to others from their home country or region of origin. Most of the participants, 11 students, gave an affirmative answer to this question. The Middle Eastern student (IS13) answered "No" to this question. Finally, a Chinese male stated:

I would, but not particularly to LGBT students. I mean there is an LGBT student organization. But I have heard good and bad things about them so I didn't really join them. Especially for the T section, I have two [transgender] friends who went to some events and they were not impressed. (IS05-21)

His response was decidedly more negative than those of the other participants in the study.

Question 28 of the interview asked students if they felt connected to the campus. Six of the interviewees gave affirmative answers to this question. Four participants provided somewhat mixed responses to the question. For example, a Chinese female answered, "Not really. I'm

connected to the school I think. Because I haven't been involved in many campus activities to be connected to the campus I think" (IS02-28). Furthermore, the other Chinese female said, "Somewhat connected. As a grad student, I don't really live on the campus. I only come when I have class" (IS01-28). For this question, one Chinese male answered, "Like in the middle" (IS08-28). Finally, the Southeast Asian student gave a mixed response when he said, "Um yeah, but I feel like there are more undergrad things. Graduate students are not too connected in my field" (IS12-28). These neutral or mixed responses often reflected the nature of graduate student life whereby the connection to campus might be weaker in comparison to the undergraduate experience.

Three students gave negative responses to Question 28 regarding a connection to campus. For example, a Latin American student stated, "No, to be honest, I don't feel connected to the campus because I go to my department, I go teach there and give my office hours, and then I go home. I go to the gym with friends sometimes. It's not like I have the same ability that undergrads do with campus" (IS11-28). This statement reflected previously mentioned statements regarding the difference between graduate and undergraduate student life. Furthermore, the Middle Eastern student provided an answer critiquing the physical nature of the campus when he said:

There is no campus. There are buildings. I mean, in my point of view, when you say campus, it's a secluded area from the city in which you have at least a green area to socialize that is not connected to the city. I mean, the university is within the city but I don't feel like I'm on a campus at all (IS13-28).

Finally, one Chinese male answered this question pertaining to campus connectivity by criticizing the lack of an LGBTQ presence on campus. He stated:

There's nothing LGBTQ about the campus to be honest. There's no like activities, things like that. Or maybe it's because I'm a grad student, I missed all those posters and stuff. But yeah, there's no association that is like, "Hey, let's gather together." Is that weird though? I don't know. It's just that I don't see anything happening on campus about LGBTQ people. (IS04-28)

His comments exhibited dissatisfaction with various aspects of the campus environment. This topic is explored further in the next section.

### **4.7.3 Satisfaction with resources on campus**

Questions 42, 43, and 44 of the interview aimed to assess the adequacy of resources on the campus for this student population. Question 42 asked students whether they felt that the university offers adequate resources for international students. The majority of interviewees, nine students, gave affirmative answers to this question. For example, a Chinese female answered:

I would say yes, especially judging from the Office of International Students. I think they're pretty supportive in terms of immigration status questions. So also, like I told you, with preparing students to come to the U.S., I think they do a really good job. And they have a really good system set up online about taking care of questions and stuff. (IS02-42)

A Chinese male commended the university's resources and the Office of International Students in particular when he stated, "Yes, it has everything I want here. If I get sick, it's really easy for me to make an appointment with a doctor. And I think the Office of International Services is really helpful. I receive a lot of emails from them" (IS07-42). The Middle Eastern student answered abruptly and negatively when he said, "No, not enough" (IS13-42). One Chinese male provided a critique of the university for this question when he said:

That's a hard question. I have no need for the university to help me with anything but I've seen other graduate students not being able to become connected to the culture and not exploring enough, I would say. I don't know whose problem it is but the phenomenon is there, that they haven't been able to see outside of the box of theirs and the university hasn't done anything for that. (IS04-42)

Furthermore, another Chinese male answered negatively when he stated:

I would have to say no. For example, because we have restrictions about entering the country before classes begin, we have problems with finding housing. Housing is a major

issue for many international students. You have very little time before classes start to find housing. (IS05-42)

Finally, a Latin American student gave an extensive answer for this question with various critiques of the university when he replied:

Yes, but I think with the grad students, the situation is different. They only go to international services to sign forms, so it's just like more impersonal. I would say this, what is hard for me to do, is to have like a network, or to know international students outside my department, which could be possible through some way to get to know other people. I mean, sometimes when I take a class that is cross-listed with many other classes, classes that are open to everyone, I get to know many other international students. And I get to notice that if I take another class, perhaps in the Women's Studies department, I get to know other people who are gay who I would have never met if I wasn't in this class. So it's always nice to meet other people. And also, there is nothing for grad students, it doesn't have to be international, but grad students who happen to be gay, like there is no organization for LGBT grad students. I know that exists at some schools at this university like the med school and the law school, but I don't know in Arts and Sciences if there's something like that. (IS11-42)

Once again, this student reflected some of the previously mentioned complaints of interviewees pertaining to the nature of graduate school life.

Question 43 of the interview asked participants to indicate whether they felt that the university offers adequate resources for LGBTQ students. Responses to this question were much more negative than they were for the question analyzing resources for international students. Four of the participants indicated that they were not sure about the adequacy of resources for LGBTQ students. The remaining nine interviewees provided negative responses to this answer. For example, one Chinese male said:

I couldn't really say but I feel it does not. I feel it does not because the university only has one LGBT student organization. My counselor at the counseling center was gay and I think he was running an LGBT group therapy session, but I didn't even know. I guess they don't promote it enough. I mean other grad students know about it, but I guess LGBT international students don't know about the LGBT counseling group which could be pretty helpful. (IS05-43)

Furthermore, five participants complained that the university does not offer enough resources for LGBTQ graduate students in terms of clubs or organizations in comparison to what is offered for undergraduate students. A Latin American participant suggested that LGBTQ resources should be mentioned during the orientation procedures for graduate students. Finally, another Latin American student suggested that the university should sponsor more events for LGBTQ people to meet each other.

The final question of the interview, Question 44, asked students to indicate whether they felt that the university should provide services specifically for LGBTQ international students. The majority of the interviewees, ten students, gave an affirmative answer to this question. Two students did not feel that this was necessary. The Southeast Asian student was unsure about an answer to this question. He stated, “I’m not sure. Maybe not specifically for international students but something for all students, American and international, and undergrad and grad that would bring everyone together from all backgrounds” (IS12-44). Students who answered affirmatively gave a variety of reasons for their decision. For example, one Chinese male stated:

Yeah, I think so because in regards to cultural differences, they have difficulties coming out, or even just to find some people they can talk to. Some international LGBT students really just want someone to talk to in their mother tongue. Because there’s so many different words to just say the word “cry” in Chinese. And also there’s all the different dialects so it’s crazy for some people who come here and they can’t express themselves. The language barrier, again, is a huge barrier. (IS05-44)

Another Chinese male also provided an answer expressing a desire for someone to talk about his unique challenges with when he said:

Yes, I just feel like sometimes I feel really gloomy about myself, especially last semester, and sometimes I just want to have a person I can talk with. So I think they should have some kind of support here, especially not public. I just don’t feel like I want to go to the LGBTQ student organization. That’s pretty much what I wanted to say. (IS08-44)

This student's sentiments may serve as a reminder that some of these students might desire services that are discreet. Furthermore, a Latin American student stated:

Yeah, I think that just making a bridge with grad students and the gay student group would be nice because I think that the undergrads get most of the resources. There is nothing for grads. But I think that just making the bridge between grad students and the group would improve things. (IS09-44)

Another Latin American student indicated that he would like such services for fellow LGBTQ international students to talk about their concerns so that "people could support each other" (IS11-44). Finally, the Middle Eastern student answered:

Especially if the university student counseling center can offer international LGBTQ support groups. Even if there is a need for Ph.D. students, since we have to [work all the time], it should be either in the after-hours or accommodating in the weekend hours, I don't know. I'm brainstorming about that. (IS13-44)

After making this comment, the Middle Eastern student indicated that he felt lonely at the university.

#### **4.7.4 Campus climate assessments**

Question 19 of the interview asked participants if they felt respected as international students at the university. The majority of interviewees, 11 students, gave an affirmative response to this question. One Chinese male provided a mixed response when he stated:

I would say 70% if I had to give a rating. The other part was there are cases when it is difficult for international students. Like some faculty members might get impatient with some international students because they don't really speak the language well when they get here. And also, some international students might not be aware of some issues on campus such as panhandling by beggars. I felt like one panhandler in particular was targeting international, and particularly, Asian international students. Also, I feel that some international students might feel disconnected from the university because there really isn't an international student association, at least not a graduate one that I know of. (IS05-19)

Finally, the Middle Eastern student answered negatively to this question when he said, “No, I mean I was [a Teaching Assistant] for four courses in the fall semester of 2015 and I was bullied by two of my students. One was male and one was female. So in their [assignments], they were blaming me for [assignments] that they could not [complete]” (IS13-19).

Question 20 of the interview asked whether participants felt respected as LGBTQ students at the institution. The majority of participants, ten students, gave an affirmative response to this question. Seven of these ten students clarified that they were not open about their identity to many individuals on campus. A gay student from Latin America and the Southeast Asian student indicated that they were not out to many individuals, but for those who they were out to, they felt respected. For example, this Latin American student stated, “Well, not many of my friends knew I was gay there. I decided to come out, but I didn’t spread the news, so only the closet knew. So yeah, I felt respected from whoever knew I was gay” (IS09-20). Another Latin American student gave an affirmative response to this question when he said, “Yes, especially in my department, there’s a lot of gay men. My advisor is a gay man. I have different colleagues that are gay men. So I don’t think that there are instances of discrimination in my department with a lot of people” (IS11-20).

The Chinese questioning male indicated that he could not answer this question because “not many people know about my identity” (IS08). One Chinese student provided a mixed response to this question when he stated:

Honestly, I couldn’t really tell because I didn’t really tell anyone about my sexuality until a few years back. I was like it’s not anyone’s business. In my department, I feel 50/50 because with faculty members in my department, we have quite a number of gay faculty members in [my department] and they try to actually maintain this very open environment. But I think that I also mention in my survey that we have a graduate student from [Africa] who is constantly making abusive, offensive comments towards gay students and his gay professors and colleagues. And I was actually trying to be friendly with this guy because we were in the same class. And then I decided that I will not talk to this guy anymore

because it's been very offensive. And you can understand his comments because of his background in [Africa]. (IS05-20)

Finally, the Middle Eastern student also indicated that he is not entirely open about his identity when he said:

In the department, I'm not out of the closet. Only a few people know me and they are already LGBT but they are American students. Among the international students, I prefer not to be out because you never know who is homophobic and who is not. And the faculty members, I never came out to because I don't know if they are homophobic or not. (IS13-20)

It was apparent from the answers to this interview question that many of the participants were selective about whom they divulged their identities to.

Question 32 of the interview asked students to indicate whether they felt that the campus was accepting of LGBTQ students. The majority of interviewees, eight students, provided an affirmative answer to this question. One Latin American student indicated "Yes" to this question but clarified his response when he said:

Yes, but about that, there was a lack of connection there in the beginning. I was expecting something in the orientation that we have in the first week on campus. It would be nice to have some introduction to the LGBT groups and to have some discussions at the beginning and we didn't have anything. (IS09-32)

Another Latin American student also clarified his affirmative answer when he stated:

I mean, I can only talk about my department experience. In my department, yes, definitely. In my department, there are six gay grad students and some lesbian girls and two of the professors are gay men. So definitely, in my department, there are a lot of people. So people are really accepted and really respectful. Even with the secretaries and the administrators, I can talk openly about my life. (IS11-32)

Three participants reported that they did not know whether the campus was accepting or not. For example, a Chinese female who was unsure about this question said, "To be honest, I don't really know because I haven't seen activities that are held by the university. I've seen posters and stuff about specific organizations, but not the university's posters. I don't know the university's opinion

on this” (IS02-32). One Chinese male provided a mixed response to this question pertaining to campus acceptance of LGBTQ individuals when he said, “I couldn’t tell. In some ways, yes, but others no. I have heard comments made by some staff members, not faculty, but staff members about the way people dressed that seemed homophobic” (IS05-32). Finally, the Middle Eastern student (IS13) student answered “No” to this question.

After the preceding question, students were asked if they felt that the campus was accepting of international students in Question 33. Nine participants answered affirmatively to this question. The remaining four students provided mixed responses to this question. For example, a Latin American student answered “Yes” to this question but clarified his response with a critique of American culture when he said:

Yes, but I was not expecting, I didn’t know how racist this country is since I arrived here. I was expecting no racism at all. But like finding out those things, that was very hard for me. Because, the same thing, maybe I was expecting too much from this country but it wasn’t like that. Sometimes I don’t know why people are not welcoming or not nice. Is it because of my race or is it because they are just not open to meet new people or being open to have more friends? I don’t know why? What’s going on? But that’s my question. (IS11-33)

On a similar note, one Chinese student also made a critique of the campus culture in terms of race when he stated:

I don’t know. This campus is really White to be honest. Even the Asian students I’ve met, they’re still like born in the States. They are very White-cultured which is different from the undergrad university I went to. I don’t think I can speak for myself or other international students because I’ve lived in this country for four years. But I would say the campus is pretty good, pretty accepting. (IS04-33)

Another Chinese student answered this question by commending as well as critiquing the Office of International Students when he said:

I mean in general, they try very hard. I work personally with the international student orientation so I know that they try really hard actually. But the problem is that employees are constantly changing in the Office of International Students so that’s kind of frustrating. So the constant personnel changes are frustrating. (IS05-33)

Finally, when the Middle Eastern student was asked if he felt the campus was accepting of international students, he replied, “I would say partially” (IS13-33).

#### **4.7.5 Positive and negative experiences**

The following four interview questions strove to illuminate any positive or negative experiences that participants had due to either their identity as an LGBTQ individual or due to their international status. These questions were also utilized to gauge the campus climate for interviewees. Question 34 of the interview asked, “Have you had any positive experiences due to your LGBTQ identity?” The majority of interviewees, 10 students, replied with an affirmative response to this question. Many students clarified their positive response to this question. For example, one Chinese male said, “Yeah, I think my colleagues are amazing. They are pretty accepting. Yeah, it’s pretty good” (IS04-34). Additionally, another Chinese male student stated:

Yeah, some professors or administrative staff members have actually tried to help me out. They advised me to go to counseling, advised me to socialize more, especially after breaking up a 6-year relationship. So I mean, they always give me hope that everything will be better. So I see a really good side of it. So there are staff and faculty members who are working to help us feel comfortable and stay here. (IS05-34)

Yet another Chinese student clarified his affirmative answer when he replied:

Yes, they accepted and it wasn’t a problem. Of course, when I want to tell someone, at first I make sure he can accept it so sometimes I will discuss some problem. I might say, “Well, you know in the United States, they accept gay marriage.” And we discuss this topic and I want to know what their opinion is. And then sometimes if they are a close friend, then I will tell them. So, if I tell them, it is not a problem. (IS03-34)

Furthermore, one Chinese student reacted positively when he said, “Yes, I think it’s a lucky thing that most of my friends support me and think it’s normal and they will introduce their gay friends

to me. So I'm quite lucky. I haven't received any discrimination in my travels in college" (IS07-34).

The remaining three interviewees provided more mixed responses to Question 34 pertaining to positive experiences as a result of their LGBTQ identity. For example, one Chinese female gave a more mixed response to this question when she answered, "I don't know. Most likely when I came out, they didn't show any opinions. My Christian friends say, "That's not right." So, but they still love. They just don't like the behaviors I guess" (IS02-34). Furthermore, one Chinese student provided a somewhat mixed answer as well when he stated, "I don't talk about it a lot with my fellows or my students. All the experiences I've experienced is with other LGBT people. When I'm with other LGBT people, I feel pretty good because I consider myself as one of them" (IS06-34). Finally, the Middle Eastern student also provided a somewhat mixed response when he said, "So in Arts and Sciences, there were LGTBQ networking events and I attended two of those events. So I would say at least there is partial acknowledgement or recognition of LGBTQ students but it's very, very limited. And I don't think it's like enough, like sufficient" (IS13-34).

Question 35 of the interview aimed to explore any negative experiences that interviewees had due to their LGBTQ identity. Seven of the interviewees indicated that they did not have any negative experiences. The student from Southeast Asia gave a mixed answer for this question when he indicated that he did not have any negative experiences but that he did not like that the LGBTQ student organization was "mainly for undergrads" (IS12-35). Five students indicated that they had negative experiences. For example, one Chinese female stated, "Yes, like a lot of the guys don't understand. Like, they don't think being bisexual is real I guess. But this is in general. It's not really tied to the school or anything" (IS01-35). One Chinese student answered this question negatively when he said:

Homophobic comments from my colleagues. They are also international students. I don't know, maybe, they should introduce those things into the orientation. I don't know what it is about the grad student from [Africa] to make him feel that it is acceptable to tell gay jokes. But then he pretends to be OK with gay people. But he's not. (IS05-35)

Furthermore, another Chinese male student said:

The one experience that I remember was that one time I was downtown with my boyfriend, there was a kid who was shooting a red dot light into us and saying stuff. I think it was pretty offensive but my boyfriend doesn't think it's a big deal. I think he said, "Look they're holding hands!" (IS06-35)

A Latin American student gave an answer regarding perceived conservatism on campus when he said:

The only negative experience that I had was about teaching. I mean, I teach a Spanish language course, so I don't need to be really open about my sexual orientation. But sometimes I get really close relationships, always in a professional way, with students that really like Spanish and want to continue with advancement. I even have taken students to [my home country] with the study abroad program and everything. So I have been resistant to be really open about my life, that I'm a gay person, because I just don't know if one of my students is conservative, or if it's too much information, or how they will react. So maybe I don't feel like I'm too open because I'm being aware of conservative students and things like that. (IS11-35)

Finally, the Middle Eastern student provided a negative answer when he stated, "There are maybe some jokes that I get to hear from my students because they are making fun of transgender people or LGBT people in general, not specifically targeting me but in daily conversations. It's discriminatory" (IS13-35).

Question 36 of the interview asked participants if they had any positive experiences due to their international student status. Eight of the 13 participants gave affirmative answers to this question. The remaining five students indicated that they could not mention any. For the students who indicated that they had positive experiences due to being an international student, three students made comments indicating that they were enjoying the ability to learn more about other cultures due to their endeavor abroad. For example, one Chinese female stated:

I think so. Because you have like cultural competence. So you know different cultural things. And I'm bilingual, so that's like a language advantage. Also, I feel international students are more open-minded and accepting to a lot of things. It's almost like you can take different perspectives. So that's a good thing. (IS02-36)

On a similar note, a Chinese male student said, "Yes, because I learn something more than I expect here. And that makes a difference. Having friends from other countries makes me learn about other countries, not just from the internet or newspapers" (IS07-36). Furthermore, a Latin American student similarly answered:

Well I suppose that international students have a different outlook on certain things. I don't know. Maybe it's a special experience. International students from a different culture can practice a different language. Possibly, getting an education in the United States is prestigious in many parts of the world. I'm having contact with people from all over the world. I've probably met so many people from all over different places in the world. (IS11-36)

One Chinese female answered Question 36 in a positive manner when she said "Yes, there are people who haven't gone outside of America and when I tell them I'm from China, a lot of people are excited to learn about my experience and what's out there outside of America, and very friendly to get to know me" (IS01-36). Moreover, a Chinese male student mentioned a positive experience when he stated, "I think the positive experience would be when at first, when I didn't speak good English, people would still have patience to listen to me talk. And that's a big comfort to me and that helped me to improve my English" (IS06-36). One Latin American student indicated that American students were often excited to practice Spanish with him because a significant number of U.S. students "usually study Spanish" (IS10-36). Finally, the Middle Eastern student presented a positive experience when he said, "Yes, I was awarded with a leadership and service award earlier this year" (IS13-36).

Question 37 inquired whether students had any negative experiences due to their status as international students. Eight students indicated that they had some negative experiences due to

being an international pupil. Five students did not report any negative experiences. Six of the eight students who indicated that they had negative experiences cited language and/or cultural barriers as the reasons for their difficulties. Both Chinese females indicated that language and cultural barriers were a challenge initially. For example, one Chinese female answered, “Not a whole lot, but sometimes with language barriers or cultural differences, you know, it’s a bit harder to make friends and to make sure everyone is comfortable with communication and everything” (IS01-37). Two Latin American students also mentioned that language barriers were challenging for them initially. One Chinese student made a suggestion for the university regarding improving language proficiency when he replied:

At first, I think I should have received some more advanced English training. I really worry about my spoken English. I wish the university would offer not just a kind of course but maybe activities that could be offered once or twice a week to advance English skills. I really want to learn something more, not just about English, but also about American culture. (IS06-37)

Furthermore, the Middle Eastern student presented a difficulty pertaining to his perceived accent when he said:

Yes, when I’m teaching as a teaching assistant, we have teaching evaluation surveys and some of the students are saying that my accent is bad. But that is not the reality. It’s, I think, because of my international student status. Because having an accent is not the case for my American students. (IS13-37)

One Chinese male gave a mixed response to this question when he said, “When I was in Alabama, there were a lot, you can understand that. But here it’s like really moderate, not negative or positive. It’s not like, ‘Oh you come from China; you are cool.’ No. Nothing negative, but not positive” (IS08-37). Finally, one Chinese student made a complaint about the employment situation for international students when he stated, “We can’t really work. So finances are very strict. That’s why I hesitate to go to gay events. I don’t have that much money. If you don’t really

have a working permit, you can't really work. So it's difficult" (IS05-37). His difficulties regarding employment obstacles are examined in further detail in this document.

#### **4.7.6 Openness regarding identities**

The following four interview questions aimed to analyze how open the participants were about their identities on campus. The first question of this sequence, Question 25, asked interviewees to describe the cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in their homelands in order to potentially gauge whether this might impact their experiences in this country. Six of the Chinese participants gave remarkably similar answers for this question. These six interviewees all said that the older generations generally frown upon it but the younger generations are becoming more accepting.

For example, one Chinese male student stated:

People are pretty traditional and some older generations, when they talk about it, they will talk about it with some feelings of disgust or think it's against tradition. Like people want their kids to get married and have some kids so the blood line can continue. So generally the older generation are against it. But for the younger generation, because they have more Western education, they tend to accept it more. (IS06-25)

Furthermore, another Chinese male said:

It's getting better. For many years, homosexuality was regarded as a mental disease. So now it's been removed from that list. But legalizing gay marriage would be nothing in the near future because it is very against tradition. I do like that there are some activists who are working to promote anti-discrimination laws and other recommendations. But pretty much, a lot of the things I know, it's all just done under the table. The mainstream media will not really get into those kinds of things because it doesn't really benefit the communist party. They also try to pretty much calm people down because we are still not really ready for that. But one of the activists, a professor, graduated from this university in Sociology and now works for the Academy of Social Sciences. But the society is not ready. Plus, China has many different religions and some of them are not OK with homosexuality. China has a large Muslim population so they are not OK. So it's getting better, but it won't change anytime soon. (IS05-25)

One Chinese student indicated that he could not answer this question because he was not sure about current attitudes in China due to studying abroad for about seven years. Unlike his Chinese counterparts, one Chinese male did not mention any generational differences regarding this topic when he answered:

It's really hard. I think the people in China, maybe because of the culture, we hide our identity. We don't want other people to know us because, to be honest, it's just like a small group in China. If you say something about your sexual orientation being different, people see you as really weird. And I personally feel shame about that, to say that in front of other people. (IS08-25)

The student from Southeast Asia presented a moderate response to Question 25 when he said, "I think it's pretty friendly there but there's still some people who think it's abnormal there. But it's generally pretty friendly compared to other Asian countries" (IS12-25). His response appeared to reflect the moderate level of support for LGBTQ individuals in his Southeast Asian home country which was presented by Equaldex. A student from Latin America presented a mixed response to this question when he stated:

Inadequate, insufficient, I mean it's not as bad as countries like Jamaica or Russia where there's like all these waves of physical attacks on you. For the most part, it's respectful. But when I'm talking about institutional rights and everything, it is a country that is super behind, even with its Latin American counterparts. There is this religious right in Congress who tries to block any kind of project, not even marriage, but protections for couples that have been living together for a long time, like civil unions. We are not even having the marriage conversation. I don't know if that's going to be approved and when in the future. I plan to stay here. I'm not going back to [my home country]. I'm planning to visit, but I'm not moving back until the situation changes. I mean, I cannot live with my husband in [my home country]. Even together, we wouldn't be recognized as a couple. My partner wouldn't have any benefits regarding immigration. It was the same here until it changed last year, which was good. (IS11-25)

His answer also reflected the assessment of Equaldex pertaining to a more moderately accepting social environment for LGBTQ people in his home country in Latin America despite the lack of many legal rights. Although another Latin American student came from a country which was described as having a more liberal climate for LGBTQ individuals in relation to much of the world

by Equaldex, this student indicated that the climate is more welcoming in the U.S. than in his homeland when he stated, “I think it’s better in the U.S. than [my home country]. There is a very huge cultural barrier and religious barrier in [my home country] for LGBT people to come out. I think that is the reason I decided to come out in the U.S. and not there. In [my home country], I am in the process of coming out” (IS09-25). Furthermore, another Latin American student’s answer reflected the more liberal atmosphere described by Equaldex for his country. However, he clarified that rural areas were more conservative than urban areas in his homeland when he said:

In my [home] city, I would say that it is better than in this city. It is more common to see that kind of stuff and people don’t react that bad. Actually I’ve never seen a bad reaction here, but I don’t know why everyone is like trying to hide. At least the people I’ve known here. But in my city, it’s not a big problem. But in the country, I would say that it is worse in the entire country, my country, than here. I would say that even though I don’t know too much about the U.S. (IS10-25)

Finally, the Middle Eastern student provided the most negative answer for this question when he simply commented, “Oh, it’s very hostile” (IS13-25). This answer directly reflected the assessment made by Equaldex regarding the hostile treatment of LGBTQ people in his homeland.

Eleven of the participants answered affirmatively to Question 29 when they were asked if they made friends at the university. However, the Southeast Asian student answered, “Not so many” (IS12-29). On a similar note, one Chinese student stated, “My classmates are all my friends, but not like the kinds of friends I had as an undergrad in college. It’s a little different and I guess that happens in grad school in a way. Let’s see, I’ve made a couple of friends, but not like good friends” (IS04-29).

Question 30 intended to more deeply examine the nature of these relationships by asking students how they would describe their friendships. Five of the interviewees provided somewhat similar answers indicating that most of their friendships were with other international students. For example, a Latin American student said, “Sometimes with Americans, it’s not as easy as with

internationals to get really connected. That's hard I think. They are nice but they keep some distance" (IS09-30). Similarly, another Latin American student stated, "Very, very close. Like they are like my family. They are international. It's very hard to be friends with Americans. I have just one American friend. I would say there is a cultural barrier" (IS10-30).

Furthermore, the third Latin American student said:

I mean, they are very close friendships, definitely with international students, because I am with those students for five years. I mean, I have strong friendships within my cohort, with people especially in my year. We are a really big department. We are around 45 people, 45 grad students. Most of them come from Latin America. Like 80% of them do. So we have like the same language, the same Latin American culture, so it's really easy to relate. I don't have many American friends and that's a problem. I used to have a lot more American friends in my master's program in [a western U.S. state] because the population was certainly more Americans than non-Americans. I do have American friends. My American friends come from [another school at the university]. They are the friends that I know from my husband who is in [another school]. But if it were not for that, I wouldn't have any American friends. And some people before that, they were Americans, but Americans of Latino descent. They were Americans but Spanish-speaking and Latino. (IS11-30)

Four of the interviewees indicated that their friendships were somewhat superficial on campus. For example, one Chinese male student answered, "Only during working hours. I don't know. That's it I guess" (IS04-30). Furthermore, another Chinese male student said, "All the people I know here are pretty new so we are still at the beginning of our relationship" (IS06-30). Moreover, the Southeast Asian student answered this question when he simply said, "Just like classmates" (IS12-30). Finally, the Middle Eastern student also indicated that some of his friendships were more superficial than others when he said:

They are fine. I mean, Ph.D. students or graduate students in general are busy so these friendships are shallow I think. These are not deep friendships. My deep friendships are very few and those people are the people I spend serious amounts of time together. One was my coworker, one was a close friend, and those people were American and non-American alike, so it doesn't have a specific race or ethnicity. (IS13-30)

One Chinese student said that he had supportive friendships but expressed dismay due to a lack of gay friends on campus when he answered:

Some of them are very supportive. Many of them are very supportive because I can express my difficulties or concerns and they are willing to help, so that's great. But uh, I didn't really make many gay friends because of the isolation that is here for graduate students. I don't really think there is anything designed for grad students. At least undergraduate international students can join the LGBT student organization here. (IS05-30)

Finally, both Chinese females appeared to be satisfied with their friendships on campus. One Chinese woman presented a diverse group of friends when she said:

There are different kinds of friends. The [academic] program, we have people, even the American students are from different parts of the country so most people don't know each other when they come in. So it's an easier environment for us to make friends. I made some really good friends, like my roommates, and I think there are maybe like ten people I will always keep in touch with. (IS01-30)

Furthermore, the other Chinese woman said that she likes her new friends who are "very supportive and mature" (IS02-30).

The final question of this segment, Question 31, asked students whether they were open about their LGBTQ identity with their friends. Three students including two Latin American students and one Chinese student provided an affirmative answer to this question. The majority of participants, seven students, indicated that they were selectively open to some of their friends at the university. For example, one Chinese male student from this group said, "Yeah, mostly, unless I know they are homophobic. I am very strategic about letting people know" (IS05-31). A Chinese female from this group said, "With some of them. I guess whether I feel if they're going to change their opinions about me, that's when I'll tell them my bisexual orientation. Especially when they're Christians, I'm less likely to tell them" (IS02-31). Furthermore, a Chinese male who has an American boyfriend indicated, "When it is not necessary to bring it up, I will not bring it up. But when it's talked about like, "Who's that guy?" or "Are you gay or not?" I will answer frankly. This is with both American and international students" (IS06-31). On a similar note, a Latin American student said, "Yes, the closest ones but not everyone. They were both international and

American students” (IS09-31). Two students gave somewhat ambiguous answers for this question. For example, one Chinese female replied “Not very” (IS01-31). Furthermore, the Southeast Asian student said, “I didn’t tell them but I’m not like trying to hide it either” (IS12-31). Finally, the Middle Eastern student (IS-13) answered “No” to this question pertaining to whether he was open about his identity with his friends.

#### **4.7.7 Health and relationship issues**

Another sequence of questions strove to examine participants’ knowledge regarding health and relationship issues in the United States. Question 38 asked interviewees whether they were knowledgeable about safe ways to meet potential partners in the U.S. Only two of the students, answered affirmatively. Four students indicated that they were uncertain about safe ways to meet partners in this nation. For example, one Chinese male student answered, “It’s difficult to answer. In fact, no. In general, it’s not normal for us to use software. Some people like meeting in bars. What I think about this is; it is not safe” (IS03-38). Similarly, another Chinese male student said, “No, I don’t know much about that. If I want to meet some new American gay friends, I guess I could use some apps. Is that safe? I think the safest way to meet gay friends is in college” (IS07-38). Three students answered this question by mentioning that they used phone apps or websites to meet other potential partners or friends. One Chinese gay male (IS04) indicated that he met his American boyfriend who is also a student at the university through a dating app. Another Chinese male also mentioned the use of social apps and websites when he stated, “Yes, I know like OkCupid. I mean there are different websites and of course there are the hook-up apps like Tinder and Grindr, but you can actually make friends on them” (IS05-38). Another three interviewees answered this question by indicating the use of dating apps as well as bars to meet potential

partners. Although a particular Latin American male indicated that he had utilized bars and apps to meet partners in the past, as well as his husband, he indicated that he didn't particularly like either option. He said, "You don't have too many options so you can either try apps or social media or try meeting people in bars which are not all the options I like, so" (IS11-38). The Middle Eastern student indicated that he utilized apps and bars to meet people. However, his answer proceeded to criticize the lack of a student organization for LGTBQ graduate students when he said:

I mean I'm using dating apps. I went to gay bars a few times. I'm using dating apps. I went to the LGBTQ organization because there is no graduate level organization, only undergraduate. But unfortunately because I'm a grad student, there is a likelihood of seeing my students there. So I would say partially. (IS13-38)

In his answer, he implied that the possibility of being in a student organization with students who he is instructing would be uncomfortable for him. Finally, a Chinese female answered, "I always say that the safest way is through friends, through mutual friends. I don't go to that many social activities with strangers that I don't know, so" (IS02-38).

For Question 39, interviewees were asked if they were knowledgeable about safe sex practices in the United States. Twelve of the 13 participants answered affirmatively to this question. For example, one Chinese male said, "Yes, and that's very important" (IS05-39). However, one student answered this question negatively when he said, "I cannot answer that" (IS10-39).

In Question 40 of the interview, students were asked if they were knowledgeable about dating practices in the United States. The majority of participants, seven students, indicated that they were only partially knowledgeable about U.S. dating practices. Many of these students who indicated partial knowledge claimed that they were in the process of learning more about dating rituals in this nation. For example, one Chinese female answered, "To a certain extent. I talk to my American friends and notice there are some differences. But I kind of know what's like the

sequence of events happening here” (IS01-40). The other Chinese female, who is also partnered, said, “I would say that I’ve started to learn lately. I wasn’t that sure because people that I’ve been dating before, people that I’ve been seeing, either they’re like American-Chinese or they’re Chinese. My boyfriend is Chinese” (IS02-40). One Chinese male student answered, “At first I had no idea about it, how to date in America, because it’s totally different in China. But for now, I’m getting to know better, but still not very comprehensive about it” (IS06-40). Furthermore, another Chinese male student stated:

Somewhat, so I’m actually back on the market because I took a break for a few years after breaking up with my ex. So I didn’t really start dating until recently. I can’t understand many things really. I mean it’s the same way in Europe. It’s kind of the same everywhere. I don’t understand a lot of thing about relationships at all. I mean the whole thing, I’m sorry. I just don’t. (IS05-40)

Similarly, a Latin American student indicated that he was becoming more knowledgeable about this topic when he said:

I had no idea when I arrived here and I had a very bad time because I didn’t know how people do that. I still don’t know what happens but what I learned here is that it doesn’t matter how good your date is, people can stop talking to you for no reason, which I think is very painful. When I first moved here, I had a hard time dealing with this and it made me depressed. I went to the counseling center to talk about this with a counselor but he didn’t help me. I somehow figured things out on my own and things are better now. (IS10-13)

Four of the students answered “No” to this question pertaining to U.S. dating customs. One Latin American student clarified his “No” answer by critiquing his orientation to the university as heterocentric when he answered, “No. But in the beginning, we had an orientation session about what not to do with girls, but that wasn’t for me. The orientation is mostly for straight people. At a diversity workshop, they brought this up there, but not at orientation” (IS09-40). Finally, only two students, a Latin American student and a Chinese student, answered this question affirmatively. It should be noted that this Latin American student was married to an American

university student and this particular Chinese student had an American boyfriend who was a student at the institution. Although this particular Latin American participant answered this question affirmatively, he clarified that he had dating difficulties before getting married when he answered:

Well, yes. Well I think that American gay customs are different from American straight dating. I don't want to be stereotypical and say that all Latinos are overly sentimental, but when I was an undergrad and when I was falling in love with someone, and when I wanted to open up and let people know I was falling in love with them, a lot of people got scared and were like, 'No, I want to cut ties.' They just wanted cruising and maybe nothing serious. Maybe, I don't know. (IS11-40)

The final question of this series, Question 41, asked interviewees whether they had any difficulties regarding student health services or health insurance issues during their time at the university. Twelve of the 13 students indicated that they did not have any such difficulties. For example, one Chinese student said, "No, the Office of International Students provides a lot of information about all of the options for international students" (IS05-41). Furthermore, another Chinese student answered, "It's really convenient for me to use student health services here" (IS07-41). Moreover, a Latin American student said, "No, I actually had to use it because I hurt my shoulder. But I didn't have any difficulties" (IS09-41). However, in contrast to the other interviewees, the Middle Eastern student indicated that he did have a difficulty with student health services when he answered:

Sometimes, not all the time. So I went to a psychologist [on campus] for two or three months and after a while she said she was not able to move on with my issue and she referred an outside therapist who was gay because my therapist in student health services was straight. Then I started to go to off-campus counseling. So I was not able to solve the issue here so I decided to go outside the campus. (IS13-41)

He appeared to be distraught about this incident during his interview. His apparently negative experience might be utilized to encourage university counselors to learn more about the unique challenges of this student population.

#### 4.7.8 Experiences within the city and nation

As mentioned, a series of questions which were not on the survey but were added to the interview pertained to interviewees' experiences living in the city of Pittsburgh where the campus is located as well as the larger nation in general. In Question 22, students were asked how their experience living in the city was so far. The majority of interviewees, 11 students, provided positive answers for this question. For example, one Chinese male student answered, "I feel really comfortable living here" (IS07-22). A Latin American student replied, "I think it's great. Much better than I thought before I went to the U.S. The people are, most of times, very kind and helpful" (IS09-22). Another Latin American student reacted quite positively when he answered, "It's amazing. I like it. It's beyond my expectations" (IS10-22). Furthermore, the Southeast Asian student said, "I love the city. I love where the campus is" (IS12-22). One Chinese student said that he liked the city after getting acclimated when he answered:

It's pretty good except at the first several months, I was feeling lonely because I was living on the far side of a neighborhood with fewer people. There's only one building on the mountain and it's pretty difficult to get anywhere, especially because I don't know how to drive. So it was very hard at first. But when I met my boyfriend and met more people, it got better. (IS06-22)

Another Chinese student also indicated that he liked many aspects of the city but clarified that he wasn't able to answer the question from an LGBTQ perspective when he stated:

Pretty good. But I'm not really a scene person so I don't really go to the gay scene very often. So I go to the cultural attractions, the museums, the sports events, the different festivals around, but not particularly the gay scene. So I really couldn't offer the gay side of the story. (IS05-22)

Two students provided somewhat negative responses to the question. For example, a Chinese male student said, "Not special things. I just study and sometimes spend some times in the city, but not a lot" (IS03-22). Finally, the Middle Eastern student presented employment difficulties within the

city when he answered, “It was fine, but work opportunities, employment opportunities are very scarce. So in the city, I already applied to more than fifty positions and I have gone through some interviews, but no job offers so far. So after graduation, it’s very scarce about job opportunities” (IS13-22).

Question 23 of the interview asked participants to indicate what they liked about the city. Answers were quite varied for this question but there were some commonalities. Five students expressed that they liked the beautiful scenery of the city. For example, the Southeast Asian student said, “I like the environments, the park, and the gardens” (IS12-23). Furthermore, a Chinese student answered, “Some parts are pretty beautiful and because I’m living on the far side of my neighborhood right in view of the park, I like all the nature. In the city I grew up, they have very few trees. So the environment and nature is my favorite thing about the city” (IS06-23). Three students indicated that they liked that the city was a mid-sized city and that it was not too big or crowded. Two students indicated that they thought the people in the city were nice. For example, a Latin American student said, “Yeah, I like the people. I kind of expected Americans to be colder, like more distant. So yes, I liked the people” (IS09-23). Two Chinese students indicated that they liked the weather of the city which was cooler and rainier than their native regions’ weather. For example, one of these students said, “Especially, I like the weather here. I come from southeast China. It’s really hot there in the summer. So I enjoy the summer” (IS07-23). Two students indicated that they liked the affordability of the city. Furthermore, another two students indicated that they liked the public transportation system of the city. The Chinese student who also previously studied in Europe provided a unique answer to this question when he said, “I mean, all the cultural aspects, that’s the main thing. And there’s a large [European] community here. I was in [Europe] for six years so I can find my roots here and get along with [European] community

members here” (IS05-23). Finally, the Middle Eastern student indicated that he also liked the cultural attractions of the city when he said, “There are places you can go and see. My family came and visited me for a while. In the city there are many things to do and see, and it’s affordable so that’s what I like. It’s beautiful, I mean, it’s not bad” (IS13-23).

Question 24 asked students to divulge what they disliked about the city. Once again, a multitude of factors were mentioned for this question. The weather was disliked by three participants. For example, a Latin American student said, “Of course, I hate the weather. The winter is miserable” (IS11-24). Two students complained that the city was not as exciting as other major cities in the United States. For example, a Chinese female answered, “Not so much. Maybe, it’s not as exciting as New York or Chicago” (IS01-24). Furthermore, one Latin American student stated, “I don’t know. I would say it’s too peaceful. It’s too quiet sometimes. Like when it’s late, it gets boring because I came from a very big city. There was always activity. It doesn’t matter what time it is. But here people just don’t go out as late” (IS10-24). Two students indicated that the public transportation system in the city was lacking. One Chinese student said that he disliked the traffic situation in the city. Another Chinese student was not impressed with the grocery store selection in the city. The Southeast Asian student answered, “Maybe the food is not the best. It’s just OK” (IS12-24). One Chinese interviewee complained, “Some parts of the city are bad looking” (IS06-24). Finally, another Chinese student said that he could not answer this question because he felt that he had not lived in the city long enough to do so.

For the question asking students what they disliked about the city (Question 24), three students provided answers relating to a lack of diversity or even perceptions of discrimination in the city. For example, a Latin American student answered, “Like maybe, the lack of diversity. This

isn't like being in L.A. or New York. Yeah, so maybe the lack of diversity" IS11-24). One Chinese student answered:

I don't want to sound like a racist, but maybe there is a lack of integration in this city. All of the neighborhoods are very distinctive in a way. Like we have typical White neighborhoods and typical Black neighborhoods. And there's still huge gaps between groups, between rich and poor, people who can enjoy luxuries and then all of those people who are panhandling at bus stops. Even on the bus, they will ask you for change. (IS05-24)

His answer exhibited critical perceptions of both racial and socioeconomic disparities in the city. Finally, the Middle Eastern student spoke about perceptions of racism within the LGBT community in the city when he said, "So in the city, the LGBT environment isn't welcoming. So I think there is a little bit of closet racism here because whenever I say I'm from [the Middle East], it's not a very welcoming environment. So for international LGBT's, it might be a little tricky" (IS13-24). The cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in the city and the nation as a whole are explored further in the following section.

#### **4.7.9 LGBTQ cultural climate in city and nation**

Questions 26 and 27 specifically focused on interviewees' assessments of the cultural climate for LGBTQ people in the city of Pittsburgh and the nation. Answers to these questions were quite varied and often quite complex as well. Question 26 asked students, "How would you describe the cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in this city?" Three students indicated that they could not answer the question because they were not familiar enough with the LGTBQ community in the city. For example, a Latin American student said, "I don't know too much about that. I would like to know more" (IS10-26). Six students provided positive answers to this question. For example, a Chinese woman said that from what she has observed, the LGBTQ people here "seem really

friendly” (IS01-26). She also said, “Like they live a peaceful life here, I think” (IS01-26). A Chinese male student answered, “I think it’s pretty liberal. I don’t need to be afraid of anything here” (IS06-26). Furthermore, another Chinese male said, “I heard they have an LGBTQ parade here every year. I think it’s good, at least much better than my home country” (IS08-26). Moreover, another Chinese student also presented a generally positive view of the city. However, he did express a grievance regarding monetary reasons for feeling excluded from some gay groups that require paid membership. He stated:

The way I see it, it’s getting friendlier. In some neighborhoods, you can see gay people and coffee shops. And there are gay groups. I mean I have a friend who organizes a gay group but I am too poor to join. It’s only for people who have a solid job. Also, we have several gay pubs and clubs. I didn’t really get into the gay scene until I finalized breaking up with my ex. (IS05-26)

For Question 26, four of the interviewees provided somewhat negative responses criticizing the perceived more conservative atmosphere in the city in comparison to other U.S. cities. For example, one Chinese student said:

It’s like, I don’t know. It’s not like in some places where you can see gays and lesbians everywhere, holding hands. It’s very rare here, I think. It’s not like in your face kind of like it is in other gay-friendly cities. But I don’t feel like holding back being intimate with my boyfriend in public. I don’t know. I’ve been to Philadelphia and there’s a gay district, like something like that. Like street signs that have rainbow symbols on them, like those kinds of things. So I guess Philadelphia feels a little bit more gay-friendly than Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is still like, ‘Ok, I won’t punch you in the face.’ But it’s different from other cities. (IS04-26)

Furthermore, the Middle Eastern student answered, “I think it’s more conservative compared to the same-sized cities in the U.S. I mean people maybe don’t vote for Republicans, but conservatism is about the social environment I think” (IS13-26). Moreover, a Latin American student criticized the atmosphere for LGBTQ people in his answer when he said:

I would say they’re regular. I mean I do have gay friends that are outside my department but I don’t think that there’s a lot of place for meeting or that this city is vibrant with opportunities for gay people. But I don’t want to be unfair, because that’s a problem about

being in grad school: that you are so engrained in your department. There are things, I suppose, like groups of gay men that socialize and have meetings and have certain organizations and an active social life. I don't participate in those. For me, I just think the city is a regular city. It's not a gay mecca or the most gay-friendly. (IS11-26)

Finally, the Chinese female student who recently converted to Christianity expressed conflict within herself regarding her perceptions of a more conservative climate within the Christian community in the city when she answered:

For me, it's like it's almost in conflict. So I know that for a lot of people, I feel like they are having a campaign, and people are trying to promote equal rights and civil rights and stuff like that. But also, I just converted to be a Christian, so I feel like people around me, my Christian friends, are still very restrictive. So for me, I feel like it's almost like a conflict. (IS02-26)

It is apparent from the preceding comments that some interviewees felt that the city of Pittsburgh was more conservative in relation to other cities in the United States.

Question 27 asked participants to describe the cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in the nation as a whole. Two students said that they could not answer this question because they had not traveled outside of the city where the campus was located. Eight of the participants provided generally positive responses regarding the climate for LGBTQ people in the United States. Many of these positive responses included comments indicating that the U.S. was more liberal and accepting than their home countries. However, students often clarified their comments by indicating that some individuals were more accepting than others in the United States. For example, the Chinese female who recently converted to Christianity said:

For me, compared to China, it's much more open. But still, at first, it's like almost everybody can accept that. But then I realize, not really. Some people still hold some really strict opinions. Some people still feel that's really not right. So, I would say more open than a lot of maybe Asian countries, but still not everyone can accept this, I think. (IS02-27)

On a similar note, a Chinese male student answered:

I think it's catching up with Europe. I was surprised that Ireland actually legalized same-sex marriage before the U.S., and Ireland is a very Catholic country. So just looking at my gay friends getting married is good. My own advisor was in a thirty-five year relationship with his partner and they got married after his retirement. So it's amazing, the progress that the nation has made. There are little problems here and there with state legislatures, like in Kentucky or North Carolina, where they try to make those adjustments. It's crazy. But in general, the progress is much better than China for sure. (IS05-27)

Another Chinese male student made a similar observation when he mentioned, "In the nation, I have the impression that the northern part is more liberal than the southern part. But in general, I have the impression that still it's pretty liberal compared to China" (IS06-27). Two of the students who made positive comments about the cultural climate in the U.S. referred to governmental protections for LGBT individuals. For example, a Latin American student said:

I think it's very good because what I'm seeing is that people are free to speak or say whatever they want because the government is protecting them. The people in general are trying to protect LGBT people. That is my opinion. I don't know. Of course there is always some people who don't like it. But I think that's normal. (IS10-27)

Furthermore, another Latin American student stated:

Well, I mean positive definitely. I mean, definitely within the last year and since I met my partner when we were undergrads. When we made plans to live together after college and probably living together, I definitely had to continue to be in school in this country in order to stay in this country since immigration benefits didn't exist. So all these things about gay marriage and how it is the law of the land and how DOMA [Defense of Marriage Act] was struck down, of course all those things were positive. I think the Obama administration has done something positive for gay rights so I feel protected in a way at least. I know there is homophobia and all those things, and transphobia. But at least in the legal aspect, I feel protected. (IS11-27)

The remaining three students provided more negative responses regarding their assessments of the cultural climate in the United States. For example, the Southeast Asian student said, "I have heard of some people with some issues about anti-gay experiences, but I haven't had any issues myself" (IS12-27). Furthermore, the Middle Eastern student presented his perceptions of an unaccepting climate for LGBTQ people in this country when he answered, "It's not welcoming. Maybe I didn't experience gay bashing but so many people do and there are debates about transgender bathrooms

which is like already humiliating. It's not until last year we were able to get married" (IS13-27). Finally, one Chinese male student made some affirmative comments about U.S. culture but also made some harsh criticisms when he said:

Apparently much better than China of course. But, I don't know. It's hard to really say. Like, it's fun but it's also boring in some respects. The fun parts are TV shows like 'Rupaul's Drag Race' where you have everything on the table. It's politically correct. It's everything. But the bad part is when you actually get into the community and you find that it's either two extremes. One that's either you have to be all in this gay culture or it's this other community that falls right into like objectifying people, objectifying gay men. So I don't know, like, for instance, there is the 'No fats, no fems, no Asians' kind of thing. It's like two extremes. There's one community that is like so nice and so friendly but it's like all gays, gay all the way. Like you have to put yourself all in there. It's kind of like a smaller circle away from other cultures. And there's this more open one that's very, I don't know, rude in a sense. That's not accepting much, which is ironic. So it's quite odd. I find myself quite lost in the LGBT community in this country. I don't know where I fit in. The most LGBTQ thing I do here is just being with my boyfriend. But I don't feel connected to the community at all. (IS04-27)

His "No fats, no fems, no Asians" comment can be observed on dating apps and sites and means that the person looking for a partner does not want to correspond with overweight, feminine, or Asian men (Han, 2008). His answer critiqued instances encountering racial discrimination as well as body-type discrimination within the LGBTQ community itself in the United States.

#### **4.7.10 Summary of interview findings**

All of the graduate student interviewees were doing well academically at the university in terms of their GPA's with a mean of 3.76. The demographic characteristics of the interviewees were quite varied reflecting a wide array of nationalities, religious affiliations, and partnership situations. Most interviewees indicated that they chose to come to the institution due to its prestigious reputation, professors, and/or curriculum. Three participants applied to the university in order to work with a specific professor.

The majority of interviewees indicated that they were doing well academically at the institution. Most of the participants also felt that they were obtaining the skills that they will need to succeed upon graduation. Nine students indicated that they were satisfied with their experience so far at the institution while three students gave a more mixed response. When asked what they liked about the university, six participants indicated that they liked their professors and four students mentioned their fellow classmates. Five students stated that they did not particularly dislike anything about the university. Two students indicated that they disliked the perceived isolation of graduate students from other academic departments as well as the undergraduate student population. Upon being asked whether they would recommend the university to others from their home countries, the majority answered affirmatively. However, only six students indicated that they felt connected to the campus. Four students provided mixed responses to this question and three students indicated that they did not feel connected to the campus.

The majority of interviewees indicated that the university offered adequate resources for international students. However, four students felt that the university was not providing adequate services. Responses were more negative when interviewees were asked whether the university provided adequate resources for LGBTQ students. The majority of participants indicated that the university did not provide adequate resources for LGBTQ individuals. Five of these students complained that there was no LGBTQ student organization for graduate students. Another student suggested for the university to sponsor more events for students to meet each other. Finally, the majority of interviewees believed that the university should provide services specifically for LGBTQ international students. Students suggested that such services would allow them to speak openly with their peers, possibly in their native languages, in order to discuss their unique challenges as well as build support networks.

Most of the participants said that they felt respected as international students at the university. Likewise, the majority of interviewees indicated that they felt respected as LGBTQ students on campus. However, seven of these ten students clarified that they were not open about their identities to many people on campus. The majority of interviewees felt that the campus was accepting of LGBTQ students. Three students were not sure if the campus was accepting of LGBTQ pupils. Finally, the majority of interviewees also felt that the university was accepting of international students. The remaining four students gave mixed responses to this question or were uncertain about this. One student was unsure about how to answer this question because he felt that the campus lacked diversity. Another student who gave a mixed response indicated that he observed an unexpected amount of racism in this nation.

The majority of interviewees stated that they had positive experiences on campus due to their LGBTQ identity. Some students indicated that colleagues or professors were supportive of them. Furthermore, most participants did not report any negative experiences on campus due to their sexual identity. Students who disclosed negative experiences cited hearing homophobic comments either directly or indirectly. One student indicated that he observed a sense of conservatism on campus that prevented him from being fully open about himself. Furthermore, the majority of interviewees indicated that they also had positive experiences on campus due to being an international student. Three of these students who answered affirmatively maintained that being exposed to different cultures from throughout the world at the institution was rewarding. More students reported negative experiences due to being an international student than due to being an LGBTQ student. Six of the eight students who reported negative experiences due to being an international student cited language and/or cultural barriers for their difficulties. Another participant did not like the restrictive employment situation for international students.

When asked to describe the cultural climates for LGBTQ individuals in their homelands, none of the interviewees indicated that their countries were particularly accepting of sexual minorities. Six of the Chinese students indicated that the younger generations are becoming more accepting despite conservatism which persists within the older generations. The Chinese questioning participant had a more negative outlook regarding China and said that he feels shame regarding the topic. The Middle Eastern student indicated that his homeland is very hostile towards sexual minorities. The Southeast Asian student said that his country is more accepting than other Asian countries, but that some homophobia still exists. One Latin American student claimed that religious and cultural barriers made it difficult to come out in his native country. However, he said that he is beginning the process of coming out in his homeland. Another Latin American interviewee made it clear that he was not intending to move back to his native nation due to a repressive atmosphere there. Finally, the third Latin American student indicated that his home city was more liberal than the city of Pittsburgh. However, he said that homophobia still persists outside of urban areas in his home country. As a result, he said that as a whole, it is worse for LGBTQ individuals in his nation than it is in the United States. Students' responses generally reflected the descriptions regarding cultural/legal climates for their nations as presented by Equaldex.

Five of the participants stated that most of their friendships were with other international students. Three of these five students claimed that it was difficult to make American friends due to a perceived distance between them related to cultural and/or linguistic barriers. Furthermore, four students felt that their friendships were superficial for the most part. One student suggested that the demanding nature of graduate school can lead to feelings of isolation for students. Another student complained about the lack of an LGBTQ student group for graduate students. When asked whether they were open about their LGBTQ identities to their friends, the majority of participants

indicated that they were selectively open to some of their friends on campus. Three students said that they were open about their identities. One Chinese female said that she was not very open about her identity. Finally, the Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern students indicated that they were not open about their identities to friends.

The majority of interviewees indicated that they were knowledgeable about safe sex practices in the United States. However, the one student replied, “I cannot answer that” (IS10-39). Answers were quite diverse when students were asked whether they were knowledgeable about safe ways to meet potential partners in the U.S. Four students indicated that they were uncertain about this. Three students mentioned that they used phone apps or internet sites. Another three said that they utilized apps and also went to bars to meet people. Furthermore, the majority of participants indicated that they were only partially knowledgeable about U.S. dating practices. Four of the students indicated that they were not knowledgeable about U.S dating customs. Only two students said that they were knowledgeable regarding this topic. Both of these students were in relationships with U.S. students at the university. Finally, all but one of the interviewees indicated that they did not have any problems with student health services or their student health insurance.

The majority of interviewees presented a variety of positive answers when asked about their experience living in the city of Pittsburgh. For example, a Latin American student said, “It’s amazing. I like it. It’s beyond my expectations” (IS10-22). Five students indicated that they liked the beautiful scenery of the city. Three students said that they liked how the city was a mid-sized city that was not too crowded and congested. Other characteristics of the city that participants liked included the nice people, the public transportation system, the cultural attractions, and the affordability. Two Chinese students said that they liked the cooler and rainier climate of the city

in comparison to their home cities in China. Although some students liked the weather and the public transportation system, others said that they did not like either of these aspects of the city. Likewise, although three students liked that the city was mid-sized, two students disliked the smaller size of the city and said that it was boring as a result. Two students complained about the food selection in the city. Furthermore, one student indicated that he did not like how some parts of the city appeared dilapidated. Finally, three students indicated that they disliked the lack of diversity in the city. One of these students presented critiques regarding obvious racial and socioeconomic disparities in the city. Another student maintained that he did not like perceived racism within the LGBT community of the city.

When asked to describe the cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in the city of Pittsburgh, six of the interviewees provided answers that positively described the city as LGBTQ-friendly. However, four participants answered this question by criticizing the more conservative climate in the city in comparison to other U.S. cities. Three students indicated that they could not answer this question. Upon being asked to describe the cultural climate for the broader United States, the majority of participants provided responses indicating that the U.S. was more liberal and accepting than their homelands. However, three of these students clarified that they observed that some individuals and certain parts of the country were more conservative and unwelcoming than others. Once again, two of the participants indicated that they could not answer this question due to a lack of knowledge pertaining to the topic. Furthermore, two students presented negative responses to this question pertaining to hearing about instances of physical assaults, discrimination, and transphobia in the United States. Finally, a Chinese male student who answered this question negatively cited experiences with racial and body-type discrimination within the LGBTQ community itself in the United States. Perhaps his most poignant comment

was, “I find myself lost in the LGBT community in this country. I don’t know where I fit in” (IS04-27). His comments exhibited a lack of connectivity and feelings of isolation in this nation.

#### **4.8 SUMMARY**

Overall, it appears that most participants were doing well academically at the university and that most were satisfied with their academic experience thus far at the institution. A majority of students also indicated that they would recommend the university to others from their homeland or region of origin. Furthermore, a majority of respondents believed that the university should offer more services specifically for LGBTQ international students.

The majority of survey participants indicated that the university was a welcoming place for international students. However, it appears that survey participants believed that the campus climate was less welcoming for LGBTQ individuals than for international students. Likewise, the survey results suggest that students generally reported feeling more respected as international students than as LGBTQ students on campus. Furthermore, the findings suggest that survey participants indicated that they felt safer as international students on campus than as LGBTQ students. In contrast to survey findings, the majority of interviewees felt respected as both international students as well as LGBTQ students on campus. It may be hypothesized that the students who chose to continue on to the interview component of the study had a more favorable outlook on the climate of the institution and therefore decided to participate in research on campus. However, it should be noted that some interviewees presented harsh criticisms of the climate of the university, the city of Pittsburgh, and the United States at certain times during their interviews.

Participants reported a wide degree of variability regarding how accepting their countries or regions of origin were regarding LGBTQ individuals. This may be related to the vast variability in responses regarding being open about their identities on campus. Generally, no significant difference was observed between levels of openness of participants to fellow international students versus U.S. students. However, there was a wide degree of variability within each factor indicating that some students were more open about their identities while other students were quite closeted on campus.

The vast majority of participants were knowledgeable about safe sex practices. However, responses were more variable regarding knowledge of safe ways to meet potential partners in the United States. Likewise, results were also quite varied regarding knowledge of dating practices in the U.S.

Three themes were apparent in the open-ended comments section of the survey: (1) a desire for more campus events for this population, (2) a desire for more campus resources, and (3) difficulties with homophobia on campus. All of these themes were also presented during the interview segment of the study at various times by certain interviewees. Other themes that emerged during the interview component of the study included: (1) feelings of isolation, (2) a desire for an LGBTQ student group at the graduate level, (3) a lack of an LGBTQ presence on campus, (4) language and/or cultural barriers, (5) selectivity regarding coming out, (6) difficulties obtaining jobs or internships, and (7) experiences with racism in the U.S. The following chapter aims to examine all of these findings in further detail.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The survey and interview findings exhibited a wide degree of variability regarding the experiences of this small yet highly diverse student population. Some students appeared to be adjusting quite well to the university while others reported more difficulties in their acclimation. This chapter aims to more thoroughly examine the results of this study. It begins with a discussion of the survey results. This section is followed by an analysis of the qualitative data from the comments section of the survey and the interview component of the study. Subsequently, emergent themes from the qualitative data will be examined. The results will then be interpreted through the lens of previous literature as well as Critical theory and Queer theory in order to facilitate comprehensive interpretation of the findings. Finally, implications for further research and suggestions for the University of Pittsburgh and higher education professionals in general will be presented.

### **5.1 IMPLICATIONS OF SURVEY RESULTS**

Overall, it appeared that most participants reported generally positive experiences at the university. However, it was clear that some students were not entirely pleased with their experiences. The following sections aim to scrutinize the survey findings more closely in order to potentially understand these disparities in opinions between students.

### **5.1.1 Academic demographics**

As mentioned, the majority of respondents were graduate students and this reflected the overall international student population at the university. However, the experiences of undergraduate LGBTQ international students might not have been extensively examined in this study. Further research is certainly necessary in order to more fully explore the experiences of undergraduate students in this segment of the study body. It is possible that younger LGBTQ international students are grappling with different issues than their older graduate student counterparts. Furthermore, it is possible that due to the older age of many of the international students, they may be forming their sexual and gender identities at older ages than traditional U.S. college students. As a result, further study may aim to investigate whether LGBTQ international students may be experiencing delayed identity development in relation to their U.S. counterparts.

### **5.1.2 Academic satisfaction**

The majority of participants were satisfied with their academic experience so far at the University of Pittsburgh. Furthermore, a majority of participants indicated that they would recommend the university to others. Despite these relatively encouraging findings, administrators may be reminded that some of these students were not satisfied with their academic experiences and this might necessitate further examination.

### **5.1.3 Campus climate**

Although findings regarding the campus climate suggest that the majority of participants found the campus to be welcoming, respectful, and safe as international students, it is clear that the findings suggest that participants generally felt that the campus was less welcoming, respectful, and safe as LGBTQ individuals. This is a finding that is of importance to university officials and it might be suggested for measures to be taken to investigate this matter. It should also be noted that similar campus climate results were found in the second pilot study of this dissertation. As Rankin (2010) discovered in her campus climate surveys, LGBTQ students across the nation consistently reported less favorable ratings for the campus climate than their heterosexual cisgender counterparts. The findings of this study might reflect those of Rankin pertaining to this topic.

### **5.1.4 Openness regarding identity**

Due to the great variability regarding the acceptability of an open LGBTQ identity across the globe, it was hypothesized that a wide degree of variability would be presented when participants were asked about acceptability in their native nations or regions. The findings clearly present that a wide variability of acceptance was indeed reported by the respondents of this survey. The largest number of participants indicated that they came from homelands which were not accepting of LGBTQ identities. This finding may be utilized to remind higher education professionals that these students come from highly diverse backgrounds and this may result in very different experiences for the individuals when they come to this nation.

This wide variability of acceptability in the native homelands of the participants was presumably related to the wide variability of openness of respondents regarding their LGBTQ identities to other international students. A large number of participants are either closeted or more selective or secretive about divulging their identities. Oba and Pope (2013) maintain that it is important for higher education professionals to understand that although these students might be in seemingly more liberal surroundings in the U.S., their ties to their native cultures may continue to be strong. As a result, it cannot be assumed that once LGBTQ foreign students come to this nation that they will come out easily, or at all for that matter. Furthermore, Greenblatt (2013) urges professionals to understand that these students often maintain homophobic and heterosexist notions from their native cultures and this might continue to impact their development long after their arrival to this nation.

### **5.1.5 Health and relationship issues**

The majority of the participants indicated that they were knowledgeable regarding safe sex practices. This finding may be viewed as encouraging for higher education professionals. However, it should be stressed that four students indicated that they were not knowledgeable and three students submitted a neutral response. As a result, higher education professionals must be reminded that it continues to be crucial to promote safe sex awareness on college campuses. It should be noted that the Office of Cross Cultural and Leadership Development at the university provides international students with a guide that warns about the risks of sexually transmitted diseases and other personal safety issues in the U.S.

Although the majority of participants were aware of safe sex behaviors, findings were more variable for the other public and personal health questions of the survey. The mixed results for

both of these factors suggest a high degree of variability regarding participants' knowledge of dating rituals and practices in the U.S. The preceding findings appear to reflect those of Oba and Pope (2013) suggesting that LGBTQ international students might have difficulties regarding safely meeting potential partners as well as acclimating to different dating customs in the U.S. In light of these findings, the University of Pittsburgh can be encouraged to implement programs to educate international students about these topics.

## **5.2 EMERGENT THEMES FROM QUALITATIVE DATA**

A variety of themes emerged from the qualitative data obtained by the comments section of the survey as well as the interviews. These themes included the following: (1) a desire for more events for this population, (2) a desire for more resources, (3) a desire for an LGBTQ graduate student organization, (4) lack of an LGBTQ presence on campus, (5) isolation/lack of connectivity, (6) language/cultural barriers, (7) selectivity regarding coming out, (8) difficulties regarding finding jobs/internships, (9) experiences with homophobia, and (10) experiences with racism. All of these themes will be examined in the following sections.

### **5.2.1 Desire for more events**

The findings reveal that there needs to be a more concerted effort to establish more university-sponsored events for LGBTQ international students. LGBTQ international students are yearning for opportunities to meet similar peers. Tseng and Newton (2002) argue that establishing social networking opportunities for this student population is essential to their well-being and success.

Professionals at the University of Pittsburgh, and other universities as well, might be encouraged to take this into consideration when creating and implementing events for this segment of the international student body.

### **5.2.2 Desire for more resources**

Various survey respondents expressed a desire for more resources on campus to meet their specific needs. Tseng and Newton (2002) maintain that establishing mentoring programs for this student population may be crucial to ensuring their success. In light of this finding, it may be suggested for the University of Pittsburgh to implement mentoring programs for this segment of the student body. More steps could be taken by the university to introduce resources for LGTBQ students during orientation-day proceedings. During their interviews, various students also indicated that there were not enough resources for themselves and their peers. University administrators can more proactively promote resources which currently exist or are in the process of being initiated on campus.

### **5.2.3 Desire for LGBTQ graduate-level organization**

As all of the interviewees were graduate students, a desire for an LGBTQ student organization at the graduate level was expressed numerous times during the interviews. Various interviewees attributed certain difficulties on campus due to the lack of such an organization. These findings might be utilized to encourage the initiation of a university-wide graduate level organization for LGBTQ students at the University of Pittsburgh, as well as other institutions that may be lacking one.

#### **5.2.4 Lack of LGBTQ presence on campus**

During the interviews, various students complained about the lack of an LGBTQ presence on campus. Furthermore, some students complained that there was a perceived atmosphere of conservatism on campus that prevented them from being fully open about their identities. According to Young & McKibbin (2013), visible signs of support for LGBTQ students—such as Safe Zone rainbow stickers—promote acceptance and support on campus. These researchers argue that signs of a presence of an affirmative culture on campus are crucial to creating a positive, welcoming atmosphere for students.

The University of Pittsburgh currently offers a training program called the “Allies Network” that promotes respect and understanding for LGBTQ individuals. At the conclusion of the training program, participants are given rainbow insignia to post on office doors in order to promote an accepting and welcoming atmosphere. Although the university is commendably providing this training in order to raise visibility, it is clear that some participants of this study felt that it might be encouraged to make this presence even more visible, particularly in academic departments where this might be lacking.

#### **5.2.5 Isolation and lack of connection**

Interviewees often expressed feelings of isolation and a lack of connectivity to campus during their interviews. This was often related to the nature of graduate school life in general in higher education in this nation. Furthermore, numerous researchers have also found that international students in general often report feelings of isolation and loneliness during the acculturation process in their new host countries (McClure, 2007; Sherry et al., 2009). In light of these previous findings,

it should be noted that findings in the present study regarding feeling isolated or lonely may be related to students' international status and not their LGBTQ identity for some individuals.

Due to these findings, the University of Pittsburgh might be encouraged to create support networks so that LGBTQ international students can talk about their unique concerns with one another. It might be encouraged for the Counseling Center at the university to implement a counseling group as soon as possible in order to assist this student population. Furthermore, it is imperative for university employees at every level, from professors to advisors, to be aware of this often hidden segment of the student body and the potential for despondence within this population.

#### **5.2.6 Language and cultural barriers**

Various interviewees indicated that language and/or cultural barriers created obstacles for them at one time or another at the university. The Office of International Students and the Student Affairs Office at the University of Pittsburgh could be encouraged to create more events and programming for this population pertaining to learning about American norms and customs. Another interview finding that relates to language and cultural barriers pertains to various students indicating that most of their friendships were with other international students. Some participants maintained that it was difficult to form friendships with U.S. students. They claimed that linguistic and cultural barriers were preventing them from fully engaging the entire student population. This finding is similar to those of previous studies indicating that international students often form social networks that consist of other international students, and with individuals from their native countries in particular (Maudeni, 2001; Neri & Ville, 2008). These findings may be utilized to urge University of Pittsburgh professionals to develop programs and even curricula that are more cross-culturally inclusive.

### **5.2.7 Selectivity about openness**

The findings of this study may serve as a reminder that various researchers have found that international students often have difficulties coming out on U.S. campuses despite a seemingly more liberal atmosphere at some institutions (Greenblatt, 2004; Oba & Pope, 2013; Pope et al., 2007). University professionals, and Counseling Center personnel in particular, might be reminded to take this into account when working with this student population.

### **5.2.8 Difficulties obtaining jobs/internships**

Although this topic was not designated as one of investigation for this study, findings from the qualitative interviews revealed that difficulties finding jobs and internships were concerning for various students. As non-U.S. citizens, employment regulations for these students can be quite complex, restrictive, and daunting. Some students spoke about these restrictions and how they impacted their lives. It is possible that some employers are uncertain and wary about the rules and regulations regarding this matter and therefore reluctant to hire non-citizens. It should be noted that previous researchers have also found that international students often have financial difficulties in this nation (McClure, 2007; Oba & Pope, 2013; Sherry et al., 2009; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). University professionals should be advised to be aware of the employment and financial obstacles that international students might encounter in this country.

### **5.2.9 Experiences with homophobia**

Various survey participants submitted comments pertaining to negative experiences encountering homophobia during their time as students. These experiences may serve as a reminder that international students can encounter homophobia with both American as well as fellow international individuals in this country, particularly those who may hail from countries where homophobia is the norm. Various interviewees also complained that the city of Pittsburgh harbored a more conservative atmosphere than other major urban centers in the United States. Reported instances of homophobia on and off campus clearly indicate that this student population continues to have difficulties despite being in a seemingly more liberal atmosphere in relation to their native countries. These findings reflect those of Rankin (2010) pertaining to the perseverance of discriminatory and harassing experiences for LGBT college students in the United States. Administrators at the University of Pittsburgh and throughout the nation should consider the safety and overall campus atmosphere as paramount for students of all sexual and gender identities.

### **5.2.10 Experiences with racism**

Various researchers maintain that international students might encounter racial or ethnic discrimination and marginalization during their time in this nation (McClure, 2007; Sherry et al., 2009; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Furthermore, it is imperative for higher education professionals to recognize that members of this student population might be dually encountering racism from the broader American culture as well as the smaller LGBTQ community in the United States. Han (2008) indicates that the Critical Race Theory method of analyzing stock stories and counter-stories can be used to uncover racial disparities. Stock stories are widely accepted narratives held

by the dominant (i.e. White) society whereas counter-stories are those of potentially marginalized groups. According to Han, stock stories of the LGBT community convey that, as members of an oppressed group, they are incapable of oppressing others. Han argues that these stock stories portray the gay community as welcoming to all people, regardless of color. However, Han's research has found that counter-stories from People of Color indicate that racism is common in the LGBT community in this nation. The present study appears to reflect Han's findings as various participants reported grappling with this issue.

### **5.3 TRANSGENDER EXPERIENCES ON CAMPUS**

It should be mentioned that the University of Pittsburgh was relatively recently involved in a lawsuit pertaining to a transgender man who was asked to stop utilizing the men's locker room at a branch campus of the institution (Jaschik, 2015). As mentioned, various researchers have found that bathroom and locker room use on college campuses can be a troubling situation for many transgender individuals across the nation (Beemyn et al., 2005; Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). The transgender man decided to file suit against the university as a result of events that took place at the branch campus. The lawsuit has since been settled.

Due to this incident, the university has taken measures to improve the situation for transgender students and staff. For example, university administrators announced that individuals on campus are now permitted to use the restroom facilities of whatever gender they identify with anywhere on campus (Rosenblatt & Shoemaker, 2015). The steps to change from a given name to a preferred name have also been streamlined at the institution. Furthermore, more workshops for students and staff pertaining to LGBTQ awareness and acceptance have been conducted on

campus. These workshops extensively focus on the specific experiences of transgender students. Finally, the university began to offer gender-neutral on-campus housing beginning in the fall of 2016.

It is apparent that that the university is taking measures to ensure the psychological and physical well-being of transgender students. During both pilot studies, complaints about the bathroom situation for transgender students were presented numerous times. For example, a Latin American transgender woman in the Pilot II study expressed concern about the bathroom policy at the university. However, it should be noted that these complaints about the institution were not exhibited during the final dissertation study which was conducted after the case was settled and a new, progressive, and trans-inclusive bathroom policy was implemented under a new Chancellor.

#### **5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH**

As mentioned, the majority of participants felt that the university should offer more services specifically for LGBTQ international students. This finding may be of crucial significance for professionals at the University of Pittsburgh. It suggests that a variety of resources should be implemented in order to assist this often hidden segment of the student population. For example, counseling groups, mentoring programs, networking events, and diversity workshops could be created in order to promote the academic and personal satisfaction and success of these students.

As aforementioned, many participants also indicated that they were not knowledgeable about safely meeting potential partners as well as dating customs in the U.S. These findings suggest that university professionals who work with LGBTQ international students, as well as international students in general, should be encouraged to create programs and events that address these issues.

Perhaps workshops regarding these topics can be implemented in order to encourage positive social interactions and connections among this somewhat disconnected student population.

Sherry et al. (2009) stipulate numerous suggestions for improving the lives of international students including implementing initiatives to raise their profile on campus and widening financial assistance and scholarship programs. In order to raise the profile of international students, Sherry and his colleagues recommend initiating programs and events that enhance cross-cultural understanding and encourage international students to become involved in the campus community as well as the broader local community. University of Pittsburgh professionals can be urged to actively follow these recommendations. Furthermore, personnel at the university can be encouraged to promote on and off-campus events and activities for all students which aim to advocate equality and multicultural understanding.

Various participants cited language barriers as a significant obstacle for them. Sherry et al. (2009) urge higher education professionals to broaden language acquisition training in order to improve the academic and personal experiences of this student population. In light of this recommendation, the University of Pittsburgh can be urged to implement more English proficiency programs for international students, including graduate students, in order to promote better academic and social acclimation to the university.

Finally, the recently initiated Allies Network program at the university is a positive advance for building understanding and support for LGBTQ individuals at the institution. However, a focus on the unique experiences of LGBTQ students and employees who are also international appears to be minimal to nonexistent in its educational programming. It may be encouraged for the Allies Network program to incorporate a focus on the unique challenges of these highly diverse individuals on campus in order to foster greater inclusivity.

## 5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Along with implications for further research suggested by the emergent themes of the study, a number of other suggestions might be made for future studies pertaining to the experiences of LGBTQ international students. First and foremost, it would be ideal to attempt to recruit a larger number of participants in order to more thoroughly examine this student population. Perhaps future studies could involve more universities locally, or even nationally, in order to form a more comprehensive outlook of these students. Furthermore, it is hoped that further research might be able to recruit a wider array of individuals across the LGBTQ spectrum in order to create a more holistic presentation of all of their experiences.

Upon review of this study, it is important to remember that some of these students are in the closet and might never choose to come out during their time in the U.S. For this reason, it might be impossible to ever completely understand all of these students' experiences. Furthermore, the number of actual students who qualified to complete this survey might have been somewhat or perhaps even considerably larger if more students who were not open about their identities chose to participate. It is possible that some of the individuals who opened the survey but did not complete it included closeted international students. Furthermore, many of the respondents who did participate in the study indicated that they were not open about their identities to fellow students. Further studies might aim to devise ways to reach out more to these students and potentially explore their experiences more thoroughly in order to hopefully make proactive improvements in their academic and personal lives.

It is also imperative to reiterate that many other factors such as race, ethnicity, national origin, and language undoubtedly impacted each participant's individual experiences. An evaluation of this study utilizing Critical Race Theory suggests that many LGBTQ international

students who are also racial or ethnic minorities might confront even more challenges on campus and within this nation in general. As the present study indicates, various participants cited encounters with racial discrimination in this nation and even within the LGBTQ community itself. Future studies might strive to further examine how multiple factors such as race, ethnicity, and language all impact the experiences of this highly diverse student population. Future research pertaining to how a marginalized LGBTQ community marginalizes other groups within its own community might also be crucial in order to effectively promote social justice for all.

## **5.6 SUMMARY**

Overall, it appeared that many of the participants of this study were excelling and thriving at the University of Pittsburgh. However, it was clear that some of the participants were not enjoying their time as students on the campus. Various participants' encounters with homophobia and racism in this nation may be particularly disconcerting for higher education professionals. The present study is of significance because it is one of the very few of its kind that has explored the experiences of LGBTQ international students in the U.S. Findings garnered from this study, and from the qualitative data in particular, may be of great interest to researchers who examine current issues in higher education relating to international students and/or LGBTQ individuals. Due to the highly complex and inextricably intertwined factors that might have impacted each individual's unique experiences at the institution, further research is necessary in order to create a broader understanding of this diverse segment of the student body.

As cultural wars regarding LGBTQ equality continue to be fought throughout the world and as the number of international students coming to study in this nation continues to grow, it is

essential for higher education professionals at every level to be aware of the needs and concerns of this potentially invisible segment of the student population. Ultimately, ensuring the academic and personal success of LGBTQ international students also promotes the success of all individuals in higher education from every nation. Promoting this success involves the proactive cooperation of higher education professionals at every level. It should be noted that numerous participants expressed praise for the work of the Office of International Students on campus. Nevertheless, findings from this study suggest that more resources and programs can and should be implemented in order to improve the experiences of these highly inquisitive and ambitious individuals who chose to travel thousands of miles to live, learn, and love.

At the conclusion of an interview with a Chinese gay male, he said, “I am really thankful for your work. I appreciate it because we are a small population without a voice on campus. And you are giving us a voice” (IS07). It is hoped that this dissertation allows his voice, along with all of the other anonymous voices who participated in this study, to be heard. Their willingness to divulge deeply personal and insightful information about their experiences in this nation will hopefully result in positive changes for themselves, their peers, and the entire global academic community.

## APPENDIX A

### LGBTQ INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PILOT I SURVEY

A researcher at the University of Pittsburgh is conducting research regarding the experiences of International Pitt students who also identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ). You are invited to complete a survey that is **anonymous** and your responses will be kept **confidential**. Individuals will not be identified, and only group data will be reported. This survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact the principal investigator of this study, Philip Tarasi, at tarasi@pitt.edu.

Please note: You must be 18 years old or older to complete this survey. Furthermore, please only participate in this survey if you identify as LGBTQ and attend the University of Pittsburgh.

Directions: Please read and answer each question carefully. Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time or decline to answer any specific question(s).

(Please click the blue box below to begin.)

Q1 The university is a welcoming place for international students.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q2 The university is a welcoming place for LGBTQ students.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q3 As an LGBTQ international student, I feel safe on the university's campus.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q4 I am open about my LGBTQ identity to other international students at the university.

- Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q5 I am open about my LGBTQ identity to U.S. students at the university.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q6 The university should offer more services specifically for LGBTQ international students.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q7 Approximately how many other LGBTQ international students do you know on campus?

Q8 I would be willing to participate in further studies examining the experiences of LGBTQ international students at the university.

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Q9 How would you describe your sexual identity?

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Questioning
- Other, you may specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 How would you describe your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Questioning
- Other, you may specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Q11 What is your Academic Level?

- Undergraduate Student
- Graduate Student
- Professional School Student (such as Law or Medicine)

Q12 What is your age?

Q13 What is your home country or region of origin?

Q14 How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?

- African or Black
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Latino or Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- Native American
- White or Caucasian
- More than one race/ethnicity (You may specify below) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (You may specify below) \_\_\_\_\_

Q15 If you would like to make any comments regarding the campus climate for LGBTQ international students and/or suggest any changes for the university to implement, please use the space below. Please do not provide any identifiable information. Thank you.

## APPENDIX B

### LGBTQ INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (2016)

A researcher at the University of Pittsburgh is conducting research regarding the experiences of International Pitt students who also identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ). You are invited to complete a survey that is **anonymous** and your responses will be kept **confidential**. Individuals will not be identified, and only group data will be reported. This survey should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact the principal investigator of this study, Philip Tarasi, at tarasi@pitt.edu.

Please note: You must be 18 years old or older to complete this survey. Furthermore, please only participate in this survey if you identify as LGBTQ and attend the University of Pittsburgh.

Directions: Please read and answer each question carefully. Your participation is voluntary and you may decide to stop at any time or decline to answer any specific question(s).

(Please click the blue box below to begin.)

Q1 What is your Academic Level?

- Undergraduate Student
- Graduate Student
- Professional School Student (such as Law or Medicine)

Q2 How many years have you been at the university?

- Less than 1 year
- Between 1 and 2 years
- Between 2 and 3 years
- Between 3 and 4 years
- 4 or more years

Q3 Which school or college are you enrolled in at the university? (You may pick more than one school if applicable.)

- School of Arts and Sciences
- Business
- Dental Medicine
- Education
- School of Engineering
- General Studies
- Health and Rehabilitation Sciences
- Information Science
- Law
- Medicine
- Nursing
- Pharmacy
- Public and International Affairs
- Public Health
- Social Work

Q4 What is your intended or declared Major? (You may enter more than one if applicable.)

Q5 What is your current cumulative GPA (Grade Point Average)?

- 3.50 or above
- 3.00 to 3.49
- 2.50 to 2.99
- 2.00 to 2.49
- Less than 2.00
- My GPA has not been calculated at this time

Q6 I am satisfied with my academic experience so far at the university.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q7 The university is providing me with the skills that I will need to succeed after I graduate.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q8 The university is a welcoming place for international students.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q9 The university is a welcoming place for LGBTQ students.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q10 As an international student, I feel respected on the university's campus.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q11 As an LGBTQ student, I feel respected on the university's campus.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q12 As an international student, I feel safe on the university's campus.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q13 As an LGBTQ student, I feel safe on the university's campus.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q14 It is acceptable for LGBTQ individuals to be open about their LGBTQ identity in the culture of my native nation or region of origin.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15 I am open about my LGBTQ identity to other international students at the university.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q16 I am open about my LGBTQ identity to U.S. students at the university.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q17 I am knowledgeable about safe ways to meet potential partners in the United States.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q18 I am knowledgeable about safe sex practices in the United States (i.e. ways to prevent sexually transmitted diseases or unwanted pregnancy).

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q19 I am knowledgeable about dating practices in the United States.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q20 Overall, I am enjoying my time as a student at the university.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q21 I would recommend this university to other individuals from my home country or region or origin.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q22 The university should offer more services specifically for LGBTQ international students.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q23 Approximately how many other LGBTQ international students do you know on campus?

## Section 2: Background Information

Q24 How would you describe your sexual identity?

- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Questioning
- Other, you may specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Q25 How would you describe your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Questioning
- Other, you may specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Q26 What is your age?

Q27 What is your home country or region of origin?

Q28 How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?

- African or Black
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- Latino or Hispanic
- Middle Eastern
- Native American
- White or Caucasian
- More than one race/ethnicity (You may specify below) \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (You may specify below) \_\_\_\_\_

Q29 How would you describe your religious affiliation?

- Atheism
- Buddhism
- Christianity (You may specify a denomination below) \_\_\_\_\_
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- No Religious Affiliation
- Other (You may specify below) \_\_\_\_\_

Q30 If you would like to make any comments regarding the campus climate for LGBTQ international students and/or suggest any changes for the university to implement, please use the space below. Please do not provide any identifiable information. Thank you.

Q31 Would you like to participate in further study regarding your experiences as an LGBTQ international student? (This may include an interview with the principal investigator of the study.)

- Yes
- No

Q32 If you answered "Yes" to Question 31, please enter contact information so that the Principal Investigator of this study, Philip Tarasi (tarasi@pitt.edu), can contact you.

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

You are being invited to participate in an interview as part of a research study at the University of Pittsburgh titled “LGBTQ International Student Study (2016).” The researcher aims to explore the experiences of International students on Pitt’s campus who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ). You are invited to participate in an interview that should take approximately 30 to 60 minutes to complete. Participation in this interview involves no more than minimal risk to you as a subject. This is an anonymous interview and your responses will be kept confidential. No identifying information collected during this interview will be attached to your responses. Participation is voluntary and you may ask to skip a question if you do not want to respond to it. Participants must be age 18 or older and International students at Pitt. It is hoped that information collected during this interview can be utilized to improve your experiences as an LGBTQ international student at the university. If you have any questions about this interview, please contact the principal investigator of this study, Philip Tarasi, at tarasi@pitt.edu or at 412-624-6233. By understanding and agreeing with the information in this statement, you are giving your consent to participate in the interview.

Sincerely,

Philip J. Tarasi, MA  
Doctoral Candidate in Higher Education Management  
tarasi@pitt.edu

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW SCRIPT**

#### **Demographic Information for the Interview Component of the Study**

1. What is your age?
2. How long have you been at the university?
3. Which college or school are you enrolled in?
4. What is your intended or declared major?
5. What is your GPA?
6. What is your home country or region of origin?
7. How would you describe your racial/ethnic identity?
8. How would you describe your religious affiliation (if any)?
9. How would you describe your sexual identity?
10. How would you describe your gender?
11. What is your relationship status (single, partnered, married, etc.)?

#### **Open-ended Questions for the Interview Component of the Study**

12. How did you come to a decision to come to this university?
13. How are you doing academically at this university?
14. Do you feel that you are obtaining the skills that you will need to succeed after you graduate from this university?
15. What are your academic goals for your time at the university?
16. Are you satisfied with your experience at the university so far?
17. What do you like about the university?
18. What do you dislike about the university?
19. Do you feel respected as an international student at this university?
20. Do you feel respected as an LGBTQ student at this university?
21. Would you recommend this university to others from your home country or region of origin?
22. How has your experience living in this city been so far?
23. What do you like about this city?

24. What do you dislike about this city?
25. How would you describe the cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in your homeland?
26. How would you describe the cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in this city?
27. How would you describe the cultural climate for LGBTQ individuals in this nation?
28. Do you feel connected to the campus?
29. Have you made friends?
30. How would you describe your friendships?
31. Are you open about your LGBTQ identity with your friends?
32. Do you feel that this campus is accepting of LGBTQ students?
33. Do you feel that this campus is accepting of international students?
34. Have you had any positive experiences due to your LGBTQ identity?
35. Have you had any negative experiences due to your LGBTQ identity?
36. Have you had any positive experiences due to your international student status?
37. Have you had any negative experiences due to your international student status?
38. Are you knowledgeable about safe ways to meet potential partners in the U.S.?
39. Are you knowledgeable about safe sex practices in the U.S.?
40. Are you knowledgeable about dating practices in the U.S.?
41. Have you had any difficulties regarding student health services or health insurance during your time at the university?
42. Do you feel that this university offers adequate resources for international students?
43. Do you feel that this university offers adequate resources for LGBTQ students?
44. Do you feel that the university should provide services specifically for LGBTQ international students?

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