

**OUT OF THE CLOSET: EXAMINING RESIDENCE HALL CLIMATE AT A  
LARGE PUBLIC RESEARCH INSTITUTION FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL,  
TRANS\* AND QUEER+ STUDENTS**

By

Andrew John Erdmann

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

(Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN – MADISON

2020

Date of final oral examination: April 27, 2020

This dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:  
Jerlando F. L. Jackson, Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis  
Clifton Conrad, Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis  
Elton Crim, Clinical Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis  
Finn Enke, Professor, History

© Copyright by Andrew J. Erdmann 2020  
All Rights Reserved

## Abstract

The study of climate for underrepresented groups on college campuses across the country has emerged as an important topic in higher education research over the last three decades (Hurtado, Carter & Kardia, 1998; Rankin, 2003, 2005, 2010; Rhoads, 1995; Waldo, 1998). More recently, a focus on climate for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\* and Queer+ (LGBTQ+) students has been added to the dialogue. A limited number of studies of climate on campus for LGBTQ+ students examine climate in general (Rankin 2003, 2005, & 2010), while a lesser amount still study specific spaces, such as university housing (Evans & Broido, 2002; Fanucce & Taube, 2010; Herbst & Malaney, 1999). This qualitative study attempts to examine perceived climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students through an examination of their lived experiences. The questions guiding this study are: (a) How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate? (b) What experiences have contributed to their perceptions? and (c) What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls? This study utilizes a queer theoretical framework to address these questions through 28 semi-structured interviews with students at Lakeland University, a large public research university in the Midwest. This study illuminates the landscape of climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students, thus informing practice and research for student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty.

## Acknowledgements

I could not have finished this dissertation without the support and assistance of many people along the way. For some, this was done through direct support, and others through passive support and friendship. For all listed below and many more, I am truly grateful.

I'm forever grateful to the participants in this study and humbled by the stories and experiences they shared with me. After a difficult journey to the point of data collection, spending time with you all re-energized me, and reminded me of the importance of this work. Your stories will live on far past this process. You all are amazing, and I can't wait to see what you and your generation does for the world.

A huge debt of gratitude goes to Dr. Jerlando F. L. Jackson, my dissertation advisor, who, despite the numerous starts and stops, always accepted me back without judgement, and provided steady guidance along the way. Dr. Jackson was one of the first people who helped me see that I had what it took to complete the doctoral degree, and took a chance on me when he took me on as an advisee. Thank you to Dr. Clifton F. Conrad and Dr. Elton J. Crim, who were foundational faculty members throughout my coursework, and provided thoughtful feedback and guidance throughout my master's degree capstone, and through to my dissertation. Thank you to Dr. Finn Enke, with whom I took a Lesbian Culture course with back in the fall of 2006; the course was instrumental in helping me see the large world of LGBTQ+ scholarship, and provided an environment for me to learn about ideas more complex than I had ever encountered. Dr. Enke joined my committee near the end of this process for my final defense, and has provided crucial feedback to strengthen my work as I finish. To Shari Smith, who has put up with me for

the last few years through countless enrollment questions and challenges, starts and stops, a heartfelt thank you. And to all of my classmates in the ELPA program over the years, thank you all for pushing me raise my game throughout coursework.

Thank you to Dr. Mona Hicks and Donna Bess Myers, without whom, I simply would not have finished this dissertation. Mona Hicks was the champion I needed when I needed one most, providing me with grace, support, and guidance as I started my role at Saint Louis University. Mona gently nudged me towards logic several times, saving me heartache, time, and stress. Mona, always centering her staff as human beings first, delicately explained why I was making things harder for myself. I'm thankful I took her counsel. As Mona left to take a new role at Stanford, Donna Bess Myers transitioned from supportive colleague to champion as a supervisor, providing the same level of grace, support, and guidance as Mona. I am eternally grateful to these two incredible, selfless leaders, and suspect I benefited from many of their prayers over the last year as well.

The support and patience of staff and colleagues over this past year has been critical to the completion of this dissertation, and has allowed me to feel somewhat comfortable with imperfection, as it exists in my mind. To Kelly, Herbolich, Kendra Johnston, and many more colleagues at SLU, thank you all for being patient with me as I've needed to make hard decisions about where to spend my time over this last year. I promise I'll be more timely with email responses and needs moving forward.

A huge thank you to Jim Franzone, Jackie Scola-Bernstein, and Scott Seyforth. It's honestly hard to list all of the ways in which you three have been instrumental in me coming this far. Jim Franzone took a chance on me nearly 13 years ago when he hired me

to be a graduate assistant, and was an amazing supervisor and mentor. More recently, Jim provided logistical support to assist in data collection phase of this study. Jackie Scola-Bernstein and Scott Seyforth have been mentors and friends for 13 years as well, and have provided countless laughs, mentorship, and guidance along the way. More recently, Jackie provided logistical support in the data collection phase of this study. Scott has provided guidance throughout my master's and Ph.D. program, and most recently served as a reader through the final phases of this project. Near the end of my writing, when I was at the crossroads of anxiety and worry, you provided thoughtful feedback and assured me I was on track.

Thank you to Jasmine Clay, who has supported me throughout this journey, and has always been a trustworthy friend. In the final stretches of this dissertation, Jasmine provided her services as a reader, a sounding board, and pushed me to think deeper about what I was learning.

To Joel Spiess, who dutifully asked me that one question on our semi-annual rendezvous to Tellos Grille and Café, and many times in between; thank you for keeping me honest. I'm so grateful for our friendship, and while we don't get to see each other nearly enough, I look forward to many more years of friendship.

Thank you to my editors, Jennifer Dessert and Hunter, both of whom worked with some pretty rough drafts in various phases of this manuscript and miraculously made these look professional.

To Moose, my favorite boy. You have been loyal and patient, and always there during writing sessions to remind me of when you are hungry or need to go out. You forced me get up and go outside once in a while, often when I needed the break most.

Now that this is done, you are owed so many more walks and hikes. You really are the best.

To my siblings – Steven, Angela, Ashley, Brad, Allison, and Lauren, thank you all for your support over the years – both in support of this work and personally. I consider myself to be incredibly grateful to have six blood siblings who have never batted an eyebrow about who I am, when much of the rest of the world does.

Thank you to Krista Haxton, who is as much family as someone can be. Thanks for taking that leap with me in the summer of 2014, and becoming my roommate, and soon after, friend. That could have all turned out very differently, but thankfully, it was one of the best decisions I've ever made. Thank you for being there during the peaks, which were few, and the valleys, which were many, particularly when I was in the midst of significant health challenges. You really have become my 5<sup>th</sup> sister. If we ever fight at a Red Robin again, it definitely will not be about my dissertation status. And thank you again, as well as Rob Ulizio, for flying all the way from Washington, D.C. to St. Louis in the Fall of 2019 just to help me move during a particularly stressful phase in this process.

And finally, thank you to my mother, Linda Erdmann, who has provided for me all she could along the way, and has always seen me, in a way only a mother can see her child. Her unconditional love, support, and acceptance mean so much to me. I dedicate this to her.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>II</b>
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b> .....	<b>VIII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>IX</b>
<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	5
RATIONALE OF THE STUDY .....	7
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH .....	8
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	10
DEFINITIONS .....	10
<b>CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b> .....	<b>14</b>
CAMPUS CLIMATE AND CULTURE.....	14
RESIDENCE HALL CLIMATE .....	39
SAFETY .....	45
POLICIES .....	52
STUDENT SERVICES AND PROGRAMS .....	54
<i>Gender Inclusive Housing</i> .....	55
<i>Living-Learning Communities</i> .....	56
SUMMARY .....	58
<b>CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>60</b>
QUEER THEORY.....	60
RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	63
METHOD.....	64
<i>Design</i> .....	65
<i>Participants</i> .....	66
<i>Procedures</i> .....	68
<i>Entry</i> .....	70
ANALYSIS .....	70
TRUSTWORTHINESS.....	72
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	74
<b>CHAPTER IV: RESULTS</b> .....	<b>75</b>
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROCEDURES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	75
INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE AND PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS .....	76
OVERALL FINDINGS.....	79
<i>Previous Experiences and Assumed Knowledge</i> .....	80
<i>Overall Positive Perception of Climate</i> .....	85
<i>Peers as Primary Influence on Perceptions</i> .....	86
<i>Locations Informing Assumptions and Experiences</i> .....	100
<i>Indicators of Inclusion</i> .....	106
CONCLUSION.....	116
<b>CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION</b> .....	<b>118</b>
MAJOR THEMES AND NEW KNOWLEDGE .....	119
ADDRESSING RESEARCH QUESTIONS.....	121
<i>How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate?</i> .....	121
<i>What experiences have contributed to their perceptions?</i> .....	125

<i>What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls?</i> .	128
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	131
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE .....	133
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	137
FINAL THOUGHTS .....	139
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM .....</b>	<b>150</b>
<b>INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....</b>	<b>153</b>

## LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM.....	150
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....	154
APPENDIX C: STUDY PARTICIPANTS .....	156
APPENDIX D: EMAIL ADVERTISEMENT .....	157

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. “EXPERIENCES INFORMING LGBTQ+ STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS  
OF CLIMATE IN RESIDENCE HALLS” .....120

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Campus climate, defined by Rankin (2005), is “the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (p. 17). Campus climate impacts all members of the campus community across all facets of campus life, in and outside of the classroom. Climate on campus is not just an issue for one particular group of students, but instead impacts all identities to varying degrees. Simply put, different spaces are different places for different students (Steel, 2010). For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\*, and Queer+ (LGBTQ+) students, current research suggests a chilly climate on campus (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998; Rankin, 2003, 2005, 2010; Rhoads, 1995; Waldo, 1998). LGBTQ+ students pay attention to campus climate before they even enroll in college (Linley & Nguyen, 2015). LGBTQ high school students researching colleges may not conceptualize this as climate, but they are aware of how “queer friendly” an institution is before selecting it. They research the Campus Pride Index (<https://www.campuspride.org/>). They scroll through their various social media accounts, taking in news stories, as well as their peers’ reviews of their current experiences.

Climate is not relegated to specific spaces or places, but instead bleeds into every part of campus. Thus, the climate of a college campus is not just concerned with the traditional boundaries of the classroom, but also extends to other parts of campus. Kuh (1994) views climate through a lens of educational outcomes, and contends “the greatest educational effects result from complementary academic and student life policies and

practices” (p. 109). Kuh further contextualizes this ideal by situating Heath’s (1968) view:

Such ideals or expectations may be more silent than vocal; they may work their effects out of awareness...when such expectations are consistently expressed in all structures and activities of the institution, then different communal experiences may mutually reinforce one another. It is rare that a specific type of educational experience is very significant . . . Rather, it is the coherence, the consistency, the ‘atmosphere’ . . . that makes . . . its impact on development. (p. 109)

Residence halls are prime examples of locations in which students’ experiences in the classroom can be enriched through informal interactions with peers (Astin, 1984). Additionally, residence halls serve as communities that have the potential to significantly and positively affect students’ entire college experiences (Hughes, 1994). Pascarella, Terenzini, and Blimling (1994) highlight some of positive outcomes living in the residence halls have, which include increased involvement, higher levels of satisfaction with their collegiate experience, and higher rates of persistence and graduation. However, despite these significant positive effects, residence halls can also negatively impact students’ college experiences.

Kuh (1994) implored practitioners to think critically about student characteristics, such as personality, age, ability, gender, etc., and how those characteristics impact climate within residence halls, and how these form different perceptions. Further, Kuh encouraged practitioners to not only think about students’ personal characteristics, but also match these with an analysis of institutional characteristics, such as physical properties and psychological climate (Kuh, 1993a; Kuh, et al., 1991). While Kuh did not

specifically name LGBTQ+ students under this umbrella of student characteristics, Kuh did in fact pose the ever-important question “Do residential practices keep certain groups invisible?” (p. 124).

These effects become further complex for trans\* students, as questions of who they live with, what bathroom to use, and where to shower become not only complex and uncomfortable—depending on identity and or stage in transition—but also a foundational matter of safety. Further problematizing this is that not only do residence halls present an uncomfortable area for transgender students, but they also serve as spaces where housing officials seek the perfect balance between the interests of transgender students and those of non-transgender students (Pomerantz, 2010). Privacy concerns are illuminated, and tend to align with what “society” and cultural norms deem appropriate due to liability concerns. Often times these concerns leave transgender students feeling disenfranchised by the institution’s lack of protection and advocacy for them (Pomerantz, 2010). Many people make the assumption that transgender issues and issues faced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are identical; in reality, sexual orientation and gender identity only sometimes overlap. It is therefore imperative for student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty to strive to create and maintain communities that are open and welcoming to LGBTQ+ students to foster comfort and safety in their learning environments regardless of where they are on campus.

Student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty play a significant role in creating safe, comfortable, and engaging environments for students to thrive in on campus (Astin, 1984). It stands to reason that it is important for these stakeholders to have an understanding of the perceived climate for students in order to remain responsive

to students' needs. It is important that student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty know what the climate is on campus for all students. A limited number of studies have been conducted on campus climate for LGBTQ students (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998; Rankin, 2003, 2005, 2010; Rhoads, 1995; Waldo, 1998), and limited still are studies focused exclusively on residence hall climate for LGBTQ students (Evans & Broido, 2002; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Herbst & Malaney, 1999). Sue Rankin's (2005) study of the perceptions of campus climate for 1,669 total participants found that nearly 36% of students on campuses today experience harassment of some kind that is based upon their sexual orientation, with 20% of participants fearing for their physical safety. Additionally, 79% reported that LGBT students were victims of harassment on campus more than any other group of students. Thus, while research in the field is still extremely limited, these data suggest that a negative campus climate for LGBTQ+ students exists. A negative campus climate has the unfortunate ability to manifest itself in many different ways for LGBTQ students, such as physical or verbal harassment and threats of violence and intimidation (D'Augelli, 1989). Safety is not the only indicator of campus or residence hall climate for LGBTQ+ students. Policies, inclusive programs, and services also play fundamental roles in shaping the experiences of LGBTQ students (Sanlo & Zemsky, 2005; Sausa, 2002).

Current literature and research in the field, for example the work of Sue Rankin, often only explores what the climate for LGBTQ+ students is in different arenas of campus, and rarely more comprehensively examines the experiences that contribute to climate. Research on campus climate for LGBTQ+ students has traditionally been nested within a critical or feminist framework (Renn, 2010). Responding to Renn's (2010) call

for further utilization of queer theory, this study will utilize a queer theoretical framework to guide its exploration of climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students and the experiences that influence this climate.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Previous research suggests that there is a chilly climate for LGBTQ students on campus (Rankin, 2003, 2005, 2010). Sue Rankin's (2005) study of perceptions of campus climate found that nearly 36% of students on campuses today experience harassment of some kind based upon their sexual orientation, with 20% of participants fearing for their physical safety. Additionally, 79% reported that LGBT students were victims of harassment on campus more than any other group of students. These statistics suggest that climate remains inhospitable on campus in general for LGBTQ+ students. Behind each of these statistics, however, lie the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students.

Taking specific campus spaces into consideration, there is a limited amount of literature available regarding climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students (Evans & Broido, 2002; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Herbst & Malaney, 1999). Even more limited is research focused on exposing the experiences that influence this climate. This study is primarily concerned with pursuing an understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ students within the residence halls. Through this exploration, student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty will be further exposed to the human element of students' experiences, and how acts of micro aggressions, mistreatment, and violence impact their educational experiences.

This study is concerned with current gaps in the literature to include endeavors to investigate what the perceived climate is for LGBTQ+ students on campus and, using a

qualitative methodology, identify what experiences influence perceptions in this climate. Without knowledge and understanding of the experiences that influence climate, there is no way of knowing how climate can be improved. If the main goal of student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty is to assist in supporting the learning of students and their ultimate matriculation, it remains imperative that we continue to learn more about what the perceived climate for LGBTQ+ students is inside of residence halls, along with the experiences that help to shape these perceptions.

At this point, no research can be found that provides data suggesting negative climates have the potential to impact LGBTQ+ students negatively. Cabrera et al. (1999) found that if students believed that the climate on campus was “racist,” then it would have a negative impact on academic experiences, and student development—both academic and developmental. Additionally, they found that the students might not be committed to the institution, and may not persist at the rate their peers do. This finding provides an example of how another marginalized group is impacted by a negatively-perceived climate. The problem, in reference to LGBTQ+ students and their perceived climate, is that not only is it unclear as to what the perceived climate is, but we know little of how climate impacts students in either direction. Understanding this will serve as a springboard to examining issues of how climate impacts academic and developmental success for students in college.

It is also important to note that the issues trans\* students face in residence halls are not necessarily the same as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer students (Beemyn, 2005; Schneider, 2010). This is specifically noted because trans\* students are often left on the margins within an already marginalized group within research, and even less is known

about these students as a result. This is especially important to note for this study, as it is hoped that it will give a glimpse of the experiences of trans\* students when illuminated next to their lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer peers.

### **Rationale of the Study**

Current research and literature on climate for LGBTQ+ students on campus currently focuses mainly on campus in general (Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia, 1998; Rankin, 2003, 2005, 2010; Rhoads, 1995; Waldo, 1998), with a limited amount of research targeted on residence hall climate for these students (Evans & Broido, 2002; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Herbst & Malaney, 1999). The lack of research in this field is the main impetus for this study. Second, current research in the field is predominantly nested within a critical and/or feminist framework (Renn, 2010), and is not examined through a queer theoretical lens. This study was conducted within a queer theoretical framework, enhancing the issues that LGBTQ+ students are confronted with in their educational journeys in a personalized way that gives credence to their unique identities. A third reason for this study is the need for student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty to better understand LGBTQ+ students' experiences in residence halls. A push for understanding has been identified within several studies (Evans & Broido, 2002; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Herbst & Malaney, 1999).

While this study does not assume that all students live in a residence hall at any one part of their collegiate careers, it does strive to highlight the potential for impact that residence hall living has for students who do live in a residence hall at some point in their collegiate career. Finally, this study examined not only the experiences of participants as

a whole, but also by breakdown of specific identities. An analysis of the experiences of trans\* students versus other participants was conducted, as well as a breakdown of experiences by gender and race. Doing so was imperative in this study in order to avoid inferences that only participants' LGBTQ+ identities shape their perceptions of climate on campus. Using this study as a baseline understanding of how the climate is perceived along with what experiences influence those perceptions provides student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty with information on the current state of climate for LGBTQ+ students in residence halls at large research institutions. Furthermore, recommendations from this study provide explicit ways in which change to positively influence climate can be facilitated.

### **Significance of the Research**

The results of this study provide student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty with a better understanding of perceived residence hall climate for LGBTQ+ students by addressing current gaps in the literature and teasing out the lived experiences of the students studied. Beyond providing an understanding of climate for LGBTQ+ students, student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty will understand the experiences that contribute to this perceived climate—in both positive and negative terms. Student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty are provided with a glimpse of the human element of students' experiences, and how acts of micro aggressions, mistreatment, and violence and impact their educational experiences. This deeper understanding will assist in the development of programs, policies, and practices that will improve climate for LGBTQ+ students. This study illuminates the need for innovative programs and services on campuses nationwide for all

LGBTQ+ students in order to foster environments in which all students are welcomed and supported in their learning.

Doing so not only provides practitioners, administrators, and faculty members with an understanding of what the perceived climate is, but informs the implementation of programs, policies, and practices that can work to improve the climate in the interest of LGBTQ+ students. Additionally, Rankin (2006) notes that perceptions of climate appear to influence the degree to which students become engaged in their learning and with the institution. The need to understand what climate is for LGBTQ+ students does not just extend to developing programs and services that will support students and foster an increasingly positive climate. Beyond this, climate is vital to understand due to the influence it has on how students interact with their institution.

Kaya (2004) notes that “a positive living experience in a residence hall not only plays an important role in developing social and academic networks, but may also provide a smooth transition to college, which is essential to first-year students’ success.” Finally, this research illuminates the differing experiences of students based upon identity, highlighting how certain sub-sects of students, such as trans\* students or queer students of color have vastly different experiences and needs based upon their differing realities. This is especially important in the case of trans\* students, as challenges related to sexual orientation and gender identity will only sometimes overlap. Current literature in the field falls significantly short in addressing climate for LGBTQ+ students using a very broad scope, resulting in a significant gap in an understanding of the experiences of trans\* students and queer students of color.

### **Research Questions**

This study attempts to examine perceived climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students through an examination of their experiences. Specifically, this study asks the following questions: (a) How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate?; (b) What experiences have contributed to their perceptions? and (c) What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls? To guide this study, a qualitative methodology was utilized, with data collected from a large Research-1 institution in the form of interviews. Collecting data through interviews allowed the data to reflect participants' lived experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of why climate in residence halls matters.

### **Definitions**

Jourian (2015) notes that scholarship and practice in higher education over the last decade has utilized a model of four components of sexual identity: "sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation" (p. 13). Jourian goes on to add that categorizing these components into fixed categories limits an understanding of individual's identities. Instead, Jourian argues, viewing these as four "interactive, fluid, and nonbinary continua allows us to discuss gender and sexuality in complex and nuanced ways that provide room for agency and self-determination" (p.15). At the same time, Jourian acknowledges that these components are inherently limited in nature, based on their lack of applicability to cross-cultural understandings. In other words, White and Westernized understandings of these concepts are not inclusive of all of the ways people understand their own identities.

For the purpose of mutual understanding, the following definitions are provided in order to grant readers with an understanding of the technical terms to be used in this study. All definitions are taken from the Safe Zone Project's LGBTQ+ Glossary of Terms.

**Gender Identity:** the internal perception of an one's gender, and how they label themselves, based on how much they align or don't align with what they understand their options for gender to be.

**Sexual Orientation:** the type of sexual, romantic, emotional/spiritual attraction one has the capacity to feel for some others, generally labeled based on the gender relationship between the person and the people they are attracted to.

**Lesbian:** women who are primarily attracted romantically, erotically, and/or emotionally to other women.

**Gay:** experiencing attraction solely (or primarily) to some members of the same gender.

**Bisexual:** A person who is attracted to two sexes or two genders, but not necessarily simultaneously or equally.

**Androsexual:** being primarily sexually, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to men, males, and/or masculinity.

**Asexual:** experiencing little or no sexual attraction to others and/or a lack of interest in sexual relationships/behavior.

**Transfeminine:** Identity label sometimes adopted by male-to-female transsexuals or transgender people to signify that they are women while still affirming their history as assigned male sex at birth.

**Transgender:** an umbrella term for anyone whose sex assigned at birth and gender identity do not correspond in the expected way.

**Transmasculine:** An identity label sometimes adopted by female-to-male transgender people or transsexuals to signify that they are men while still affirming their history as assigned female sex at birth.

**Trans\*:** an umbrella term covering a range of identities that transgress socially-defined gender norms. Trans with an asterisk is often used in written forms (not spoken) to indicate that you are referring to the larger group nature of the term, and specifically including non-binary identities, as well as transgender men (transmen) and transgender women (transwomen). For the purpose of this study, please note that language will modulate between ‘transgender’ and ‘trans\*,’ based on whether the context rests in language used by other authors or myself.

Whenever possible, ‘trans\*’ will be used to be more inclusive of all identities.

**Non-Binary/Genderqueer:** a gender identity label often used by people who do not identify with the binary of man/woman.

**Pansexual:** a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction for members of all gender identities/expressions.

**Queer:** an umbrella term to describe individuals who don’t identify as straight and/or cisgender.

As a further note on language, I believe it is important to explore the use of the asterisk in the term “trans\*.” Both the presence and absence of this asterisk has been at the center of debate within the LGBTQ+ community at-large. While not all people prefer or use the asterisk, I use the asterisk intentionally in this dissertation, and in full

recognition of its critiques. My reason for its use draws back to its original intentions – to indicate broad inclusivity, and that the concept of transness is complicated, and to be inclusive of non-binary trans\* identities (Jourian, 2015). The roots of the asterisk are attributed to its use as a search technique, allowing computer users to search for “trans-” as a prefix, by inserting the asterisk after (Tompkins, 2014). While it is true that a search of “trans\*” into an internet search engine would not likely yield results for terms such as “gender fluid,” “non-binary,” etc., I use it in recognition of the spirit of its use. Finally, in recognition that the words “lesbian,” “gay,” “bisexual,” and “queer” do not encompass all sexual orientations represented by the participants in this study, I have added a “+” sign throughout, as appropriate, to represent some of the lesser-occurring identities portrayed in this study, such as “pansexual,” “asexual,” “androsexual,” and more.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter two provides an overview of the current landscape in the field of climate for LGBTQ+ students. For this research, keywords pertinent to the focus of this study were used, such as “climate,” “residence,” “student,” “gay,” and “lesbian.” For this literature review, I utilized the University of Wisconsin’s E-Resource Gateway to find applicable articles in the *Educational Research Information Clearinghouse*, and *Google Scholar* to find applicable articles, books, and journals from a variety of sources. Due to the limited research on climate on both campus and within residence halls for LGBTQ+ students (Evans & Broido, 2002; Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Fanucce & Taub, 2010; Herbst & Malaney, 1999), it was imperative to approach this literature through a funneled approach. The following literature review examines relevant literature in the field pertaining to residence hall climate for LGBTQ+ students. The literature review is organized into the following strands, all based upon major themes currently found in literature on this particular topic: campus climate and culture, residence hall climate, safety, policies, and student services and programs. To conclude this chapter, a summary of all the literature discussed is presented. This summary provides an overview of all major themes that emerge from the literature.

### **Campus Climate and Culture**

To contextualize climate studies for LGBTQ+ students, it is beneficial to briefly consider the landscape of climate for another underrepresented group: Students of Color (SOC). It should be noted however, that the diversity of world experiences vary vastly based on a specific identity. For example, one cannot accurately generalize and state that Black students’ experiences would be the same as Latino/a students’ experiences for the

sake of this contextualization. However, it *is* helpful for the reader to consider how climate impacts various groups in similar and different capacities.

Related to how this literature review explores LGBTQ+ students' perceptions of climate based on multiple identities, Hurtado, Carter, & Kardia (1998) point to how students from different racial and ethnic sub groups have varying perspectives of what exemplifies diversity on campus, and by extension, the factors that contribute to their perceptions of climate. Additionally, SOC also report a chilly climate, due to factors such as feelings of stress that have derived from their underrepresented identities, specifically at primarily white institutions.

While LGBTQ+ students and SOC could connect their experiences at length, there is no denying the differences in how they experience their identities and perceive climate on a daily basis. Hurtado, Carter, and Kardia (1998) assert that SOC experience a myriad of stressors that would be uncommon for an LGBTQ student. In this case, it is assumed that the LGBTQ student is White. Resentment from their majority peers, stereotyping, and perceived discrimination from campus administrators are just a few of the stressors that SOC experience. Additionally, responses of surprise from their peers, staff, or faculty members when they are successful in class can also have a negative impact on SOC. Finally, Hurtado, Carter, and Kardia (1998) state that overt and covert violence are the most serious threats that SOC face. While the stressors of campus life based on identity (such as overt and covert violence, stereotyping, and perceived discrimination) may overlap in some areas between LGBTQ students and SOC, other components, such as resentment from their peers and surprise at being successful, do not often overlap.

Written down, it is easy for one to scan through the list of potential atrocities faced by all students of underrepresented groups and fail to think critically about what this means for students. Rankin (2006) states that not only does perception of climate for underrepresented students appear to influence the degree of engagement with the learning enterprise, but it also has the potential to impact the educational and developmental outcomes for college students. With this, Rankin issues the call for those working in higher education to intervene.

Climate on college and university campuses across the country is often only discussed when thinking about marginalized populations on campus across identity markers such as race, religion, ability, sexual orientation, etc. Climate however, can extend much further than this, and bleeds into the fabric of a campus community. Climate is defined as “the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (Rankin, 2005, p. 17). When speaking to the meaning and significance of climate, it is imperative to include the concept of culture. Culture is defined by Kuh and Whitt (2000) as “a social or normative glue- based on shared values and beliefs that hold organizations together” (p. 161). Because of the nature of culture, it is important that culture is taken into consideration when studying climate, as it is deeply engrained into the fabric of the community and impacts all members—students, staff, faculty, and campus administrators alike. Peterson and Spencer (2000) explore climate and cultures’ many connections and interactions, stating that both serve to recruit and socialize new members to organizations, which creates organizational identity for

members, and serve to provide a lens through which members of an organization understand the organization.

Climate and culture however do not only fit within the unseen on campuses across the country—they exist in everyday life on campus, through both curricular and co-curricular arenas (Kuh & Whitt, 2000). Each artifact of climate and culture influences other aspects, and impacts members of the community. Because of this impact, it could be argued that a significant aspect of campus to assess is the curricular component, as it is the most common connection all members of a campus community have in common.

Both climate and culture on campuses across the country not only affect the institution's community members, but also the different departments and other structures within the university (Kuh & Whitt, 2000). Residence halls are no exceptions to this. The overall climate and culture of the institution filters into the climate and culture of the residence halls on campus, mainly by way of values, beliefs, and other such social artifacts within which community members live. Residence hall climate can also have an impact on the overall climate and culture of the greater university. Oftentimes halls serve as places of cultivation for climate and culture for many first-year students living within them—students who contribute to the climate and culture positively or negatively (Kuh & Whitt). Furthermore, it could be argued that residence halls are often the first and/or most significant experience students have upon arrival on campus.

For LGBTQ+ members of a campus community, a hostile climate for students can manifest itself in a variety of different ways. Some of the ways a hostile climate can manifest itself include direct means such as threats against physical safety, derogatory remarks or jokes towards LGBTQ+ students, and anti-gay graffiti (Carter, Hurtado, &

Kardia, 1998). Microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative slights and insults towards members of oppressed groups” (Nadal, 2008). Microaggressions include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations, all of which have an impact on those experiencing these in their daily lives (Nadal et al., 2011). Indirect manifestations of a negative climate for LGBTQ students include limited access to resources, a lack of LGBTQ issues taught in classes, and a lack of role models or mentors within the institution (Carter, Hurtado, & Kardia, 1998).

Rankin’s (2003) empirical study on campus climate for GLBT students, staff, faculty, and administrators is considered to be one of the seminal and preeminent research studies of campus climate for GLBT individuals. The purpose of Rankin’s study was to examine the experiences of GLBT students, staff, faculty, and administrators on campus, their perceptions of the climate on their campus, and their perceptions of institutional actions taken by administrators of their individual institutions.

Rankin (2003) utilized snowball-sampling methods to issue and collect surveys to participants across 14 different institutions, totaling 1,669 participants. Participants in the study included students, staff, and faculty members from each of the 14 institutions, with 43% of respondents being undergraduate students, 17% graduate and professional students, 22% staff members, 6% administrators, 9% faculty, and 3% declining to provide this information. By racial and ethnic identity, 1434 respondents were White, while the remaining respondents were comprised of the following: 59 Black/African American; 94 Asian/Pacific Islander; 25 Middle Eastern; 38 American Indian/Alaskan

Native; and 110 Chicano/Latino/Hispanic. Gender identity demographics found that 51% of the participants were female, 43% male, 4% transgender, and 2% declined to disclose this information. Finally, sexual orientation of the respondents was broken down as 35% gay, 28% lesbian, 21% bisexual, 8% heterosexual, and 5% uncertain.

From the data collected from this quantitative study, Rankin identified three trends from the data. The first was “lived oppressive experiences,” which noted that more than one-third (36%) of GLBT undergraduate students reported experiencing harassment within the past year. The second trend, “perceptions of anti-GLBT oppression on campus,” found that 43% of the respondents rated the overall campus climate as homophobic. Lastly, the third trend, “institutional actions,” found that 41% of respondents state that their college/university was not addressing issues related to sexual orientation/gender identity. Furthermore, 43% felt that the curriculum did not represent the contributions of GLBT people. The majority of respondents (64%) agree that their “work site or their classrooms accepted them as GLBT people and their institution provides visible resources on GLBT issues and concerns (72%)” (Rankin, 2003, p. 4-5).

While Rankin’s (2003) study provides a foundation for scholars and practitioners to understand climate on campus for GLBT individuals, it does come with limitations. Most notably, the participating institutions all had campus centers devoted to GLBT issues on campus that addressed the issues through programming, policy, etc. It is likely that the same institutions that have funding and resources dedicated to campus centers serving the GLBT on their respective campuses were the same institutions that tended to be more welcoming and inclusive overall. This dynamic may limit the degree to which an

accurate picture of what perceptions of climate on campus actually look like throughout a variety of institutions.

It is imperative that practitioners and campus administrators not only know what the climate on campus is for any student, but that intentional efforts around improving climate and creating opportunities to change within this area can be made. Rankin (2003) offered recommendations for campuses to use to improve climate for GLBT students including “focusing on recruitment and retention, demonstrating institutional commitment, integrating GLBT issues into the curriculum, providing educational programming, and creating safe spaces for dialogue and interaction” (p. 16). Rankin’s approach signifies a “whole student” concept, and recognizes that students are not just educated in the classroom, but that learning extends beyond the physical boundaries of the traditional classroom for all students.

In 2010, Rankin (2010) produced the follow-up study, entitled *The 2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People*, using Renn’s (2010) queer theoretical approach. In this follow-up study, there were 5,149 total participants, spanning the entire United States. Of all participants, 46% of respondents being undergraduate students, 17% graduate and professional students, 21% staff members, 7% administrators, and 10% faculty. By racial and ethnic identity, 4194 identified as White, while 1335 identified as “People of Color.” Gender identity demographics found that 48% of the participants identified as woman, 3% as transmasculine, 2% as transfeminine, and 8% as “other.” Finally, demographic information by sexual orientation of the respondents was broken down as 33% gay (or

similar), 20% lesbian (or similar), 12% bisexual, 16 % queer, 16% heterosexual, and 5% asexual.

Rankin's (2010) findings not only supported previous findings, but also demonstrated that the climate for LGBTQ persons on college campuses across the nation can still be considered antagonistic. Rankin found that LGBTQ respondents experienced significantly greater harassment and were more likely to negatively perceive campus climate than their heterosexual counterparts. Respondents who identified as transmasculine, transfeminine, and gender non-conforming (GNC) experienced higher rates of harassment than those who identify within the gender binary (i.e., men and women), and reported more negative perceptions of campus climate when compared with those who identify within the gender binary. Additionally, LGBTQ, transmasculine, transfeminine, and GNC respondents were most likely to demonstrate individual behaviors that were responses to a negative campus climate, and were most likely to disagree with their institution's actions through its policies, procedures, programs, and curriculum. Finally, it was found that respondents with multiple minoritized identities (e.g., racial identity and sexual identity) were more likely to experience more than one form of oppression, as well as an increase in negative perceptions of campus climate.

Rankin (2010) offered several "best practices" for higher education professionals to employ when trying to improve the lives of LGBTQ students. These include (a) developing inclusive policies across the university; (b) demonstrating institutional commitments to LGBTQ concerns across the university; (c) integrating these same issues into the formal curriculum; (d) responding efficiently and appropriately to LGBTQ related incidents; (e) creating spaces for students to dialogue about LGBTQ issues within

campus housing; (f) offering counseling and healthcare on campus inclusive of LGBTQ issues; and finally, (g) striving to improve recruitment and retention of LGBTQ individuals.

While Rankin's (2010) studies continue to stand at the forefront of research concerning campus climate for LGBTQ persons on campus, limitations remain. The lack of information surrounding the lived experiences of individual participants- the specific acts of harassment, the violence, the isolation, can have the effect of diluting the impact of their experiences. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, there may be an inherent bias in the sampling of institutions, as each have a campus center devoted to GLBT issues on campus.

Specific to trans\* students, Beemyn (2003) offers 11 best-practices. These include (a) establishing a LGBT Center with both full and part-time staff; (b) creating "train the trainer" opportunities on campus from which all members of the university community can learn about transgender issues and how to facilitate training around these issues; (c) providing transgender issues training for all staff at the institution; (d) developing policies and procedures for addressing violence and harassment against transgender persons; (e) creating a student organization for transgender students and their allies; (f) offering programs that educate members of the campus community on transgender issues; (g) using trans-inclusive language in all interactions; (h) considering and protecting transgender people when establishing institutional non-discrimination policies; (i) establishing policies and procedures that allow transgender people to change their gender designation on official paperwork; (j) creating gender-neutral bathrooms and empowering

all people to use the bathroom with which they are most comfortable; and, (k) establishing transgender advocates on campus.

Beemyn (2005) later recognized that limited services for transgender students on college and university campuses are another problem that isolates these students. Moreover, Beemyn asserted that residence halls should offer gender-neutral living options for transgender students. Many of these suggestions are also encouraged by other scholars, such as Warren J. Blumenfeld (2009), who called for a similarly multi-dimensional approach to improving climate for transgender students, but added the importance of transgender issues needing to be placed into curriculum to further transgender visibility. Additionally, Blumenfeld called for collaboration with transgender resources off-campus, and for actively working on equity for transgender employees, citing the importance of having transgender staff on a campus to contribute to mentorship and role modeling for transgender students.

In *Out of the College Closet: Differences in Perceptions and Experiences among Out and Closeted Lesbian and Gay Students*, Brown and Gortmaker (2006) conducted a study the perceptions of campus climate between out lesbian and gay students, and closeted lesbian and gay students. Stating that the campus environment “has a strong impact on the number of LG students who are out on campus” (p. 607), Brown and Gortmaker also noted that “perceived and experienced peer hostility toward LG persons may prevent students from disclosing their sexual identity” (p. 607), while the perception of a supportive community had the reverse affect and encourages students to come out.

Brown and Gortmaker’s (2006) study focused on the following questions: (a) Is there a difference between out and closeted LG students’ perceptions of unfair treatment

and need to hide identity from various persons on campus? (b) Is level of outness related to students' perceptions and experiences on campus? (c) Is level of outness related to students' knowledge, interest, and activity level in LG issues and events? (d) Why do LG students not become more active in the LG issues and events? (e) To whom would LG students most likely report anti-LG behavior on campus, and (f) What needs do out and closeted LG students report and what sources do they seek out?

The study was conducted at a Midwestern state university with a 22,000-student enrollment. Soliciting survey responses through key campus locations and city events, a total of 80 students participated (41 males and 39 females) with 61% of the participants ages 19-22 and 58% living off-campus. In order to quantify "outness," the researchers developed a system by which they assigned scores to participants for how out they were, using "not at all," "to some," and "most everyone." Those who fell at a score of 5 or below were considered to be closeted, while those who scored 6 or above were considered to be out.

The demographic characteristics of the closeted group were as follows: 48% males and 52% females, with the academic class breakdown at 5% freshman, 18% sophomore, 13% junior, 57% senior, and 7% graduate school. Within the out group, 56% were males and 44% were females, with the academic class breakdown at 19% freshman, 11% sophomore, 8% junior, 19% senior, and 42% graduate school. It was noted that of the closeted students, 60% lived in the residence halls compared to 22% of out students residing on campus. Noting that the students' extent of being out depended on whether the reference group was faculty, family, students, or friends, both out and closeted

students reported being out to “some” or “most everyone,” with out students at 94% and closeted students at 68%.

The researchers found that out students reported feeling as if they were treated unfairly more often than closeted students, while closeted students reported that the fear of being harassed or discriminated against was a factor in their decision to remain closeted. Additionally, it was found that there were not any differences between out and closeted students and the attacks that they experienced, nor was there a difference between putdowns heard. However, it was found that of the put downs heard by students, the majority came from their peers. Last, in the final variable, LG students’ classroom experiences, there were no differences found between out and closeted students that would feel comfortable writing a paper focused on lesbian or gay issues for a class.

In regard to students’ involvement in LG issues and events, researchers found that there was a huge gap between out and closeted students with 67% of out students stating they are “very knowledgeable,” about lesbian and gay concerns, history and culture, while only 23% of closeted students reported being “very knowledgeable.” Also, out students reported being significantly more involved in the local community, by visiting the lesbian and gay campus center more often, attending gay and lesbian events, and participating in activism efforts for lesbian and gay issues. It was also found that closeted students reported being fearful and not having a social network as a reason why they were not involved in the local lesbian and gay community.

Additionally, it was found that out students were more likely to report such behavior to faculty members while closeted students were more likely to report anti-LG behavior to equity, access, and diversity staff. Finally, it was found that out students

reported a higher need for LG dances and events, while closeted students reported more of a need for LG related classes and organizations. Both groups however reported a need for more LG training for student staff leaders, along with discussions in classes, an LG library with books and magazines, and policy statements to support them.

Brown and Gortmaker (2006) noted two main gaps in the study, with the first one being that the study was only conducted on one campus. The authors however encouraged other researchers to consider that each campus needs to conduct their own study as a way of confirming this study and others, and to know their own situation on their own campus. The second gap that the authors addressed was the small sample size, noting that if the sample size were larger, more extreme groups would be able to be compared within the study. An additional limitation, not identified by the researchers, is that, like many other studies in this review, other identity markers such as race, class, religion, ability, etc. are not included.

In *Assessing the Campus Climate for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) Students Using a Multiple Perspectives Approach* (Brown, 2004), the author examined campus climate using different perspectives such as sex, and class standing as differences to shed light on programmatic implications. Brown noted in this study that campus climate is assessed through students' eyes based on factors such as the presence of harassment and discrimination that they have faced, fear, and the attitudes of GLBT issues of members of the campus community.

In this study, Brown (2004) explored whether campus community groups perceive campus climate for GLBT students differently, and whether personal characteristics such as sex, academic class, and discipline of faculty members impacted

respondents' perceptions of campus climate and their overall attitudes, experiences, and behaviors. Conducting the study at a Midwestern state research university, the researchers utilized general students, faculty, student affairs staff, and resident assistants for four rounds of stratified random sampling. Brown obtained 253 participants in the first round, composed of proportionally represented undergraduate students; 122 in the second round, composed of resident assistants; 148 in the third round composed of faculty members; and, finally, 47 student affairs practitioners in the fourth round. In total, 80 students identified as GLBT.

Based upon previous research showing distinct differences in attitude, such as findings of women being more tolerant of gays and lesbians, and being more responsive to gay and lesbian programming efforts, and freshmen being found to have more negative attitudes toward GLBT persons, Brown (2004) believed a multiple perspectives approach is needed to study campus climate if leaders are to have the best overall understanding of climate on their campus. Utilizing this multiple perspectives approach allowed Brown to assess the campus climate from a variety of perspectives in order to gain more breadth and depth in analysis of the findings.

Brown (2004) reported several key findings. The first is that GLBT students reported having more knowledge of GLBT issues, history and culture than the other groups, along with greater involvement in GLBT related events. Brown also found that between-group differences need to be taken into account when deciding on what programming to provide for awareness of GLBT issues. For example, to infuse more GLBT issues into common curriculum, faculty members need to be approached differently than freshmen students. Additionally, resident assistants reported a higher rate

of attitude change throughout the year than other group participants. Finally, another finding pertinent to the issue of campus and residence hall climate was that seniors reported more involvement in GLBT events and a higher amount of perceived attitude change throughout the year than freshmen. This finding is especially important for campus leaders to take into account, as it affects the differences in effectiveness from one training program or style to another, depending on the participants.

Several limitations were identified in Brown's 2004 study. The first was the fact that only one campus participated in this study, and the results may only be applied to campus climate at this particular university. Another limitation was the grouping of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students in one subgroup, where individual differences in perceptions could not be taken into account.

While using a multiple perspectives approach when studying GLBT students is most likely a thorough and prudent means by which to study campus climate, one weakness of the study is that it gives little mention of the demographics of the study (e.g., race, ability, in or out of the closet, etc.) and of what classification of institutions the participants fell under. It is imperative to know the classification of institutions studied as it provides more background on demographics and the kind of institution studied; the authors could have made clearer the gaps in the literature in order to effectively inform practice.

Vaccaro (2012) studied climate on campus for LGBT faculty, staff, and students, using social identity microclimates. Vaccaro's research was based at a mid-sized university with an enrollment of approximately 11,000 students. The institution contained six total LGBT-themed affinity groups, including faculty, staff, undergraduate, and

graduate-business, graduate-social work, and finally, graduate-law. Vaccaro utilized an ethnographic approach, and collected data through observations in groups meetings and events, individual interviews, and document analysis. It is unknown how many total participants were involved, spanning the group meetings, events, etc. Interview participants numbered 11 faculty members, 14 staff members, 18 staff members, and six graduate students. As for non-social identity demographics, five participants identified as Questioning, five as Queer, two as Bisexual, five as Lesbian and Queer, 15 as Lesbian, three as Gay and Queer, and 15 as Gay. Finally, 18 participants identified as men, and 28 as women. Seven participants identified as People of Color.

Vaccaro found that undergraduate students' sense of climate largely hinged on interactions with their peers, in addition to both obvious and subtle forms of heterosexism. Additionally, undergraduates who noted they were active on campus also noted that they would experience negative backlash in more obvious ways. As for positive and affirming experiences, undergraduates received those from staff and faculty members on campus.

Graduate students were significantly impacted by their own professional identities with their chosen fields closely linked to how they perceived the climate on campus (Vaccaro, 2012). Additionally, the graduate students identified building stronger connections to faculty, and drawing their perceptions of climate from their immediate faculty members. Staff and faculty reported feeling positive regarding climate when they felt they were accepted and supported by colleagues, and while they both acknowledged that non-discrimination policies don't come anywhere close to being fully comforting, they do have at least a minimally positive impact.

Vacarro's 2012 study presented several limitations. One is the fact that the study was conducted at only one institution. Second, limited demographic information was included for the participants, beyond what study-specific social identity group they fell under. Finally, Vacarro recognized that limited data from transgender and gender queer individuals was present, given that only one participant identified as transgender, and two participants as gender queer.

In *Perceptions of Campus Climate by Sexual Minorities* (Tetreault, et al., 2013), the authors examine students' "perceptions of campus climate, their experiences confronting bias, support of family members and friends, and whether they had considered leaving campus" (p. 947). The study was conducted at a large, Midwestern university as a way to assess current needs of LGBTQ students. The survey was distributed through a secure Survey Monkey server, which verified both student status, as well as LGBTQ-community membership.

In total, 77 participants were surveyed, with 75 valid responses, utilizing the Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Instrument. Of the total 75 valid participants, 85% were White, while 6% were Asian American, and 8% were Hispanic. Notably, none of the participants identified as African American. Regarding gender, 46% identified as female, 45% identified as male, 5% each identified as transgender or "other." Lastly, 37% identified as gay, 18% identified as lesbian, 2% as heterosexual, 25% as bisexual, 13% as queer, and 4% as "other."

Several findings are noted. First, it was found that the greater the likelihood that faculty and students confronted anti-LGBT statements, the more positive the perceptions of climate for LGBTQ students. A second finding indicated that 53% of participants

reported experiencing unfair treatment by other students one or more times. Further, 65% reported hiding their identity from other students one or more times, with 41% hiding their sexual orientation four times or more. Third, it was found that those who were not out about their identity were more likely to have thought about leaving their campus. Outside of formal findings, the authors observed that the perception of climate by be related to the amount of resources on campus, as well as visibility of support throughout campus.

Several limits exist within this study, most of which are acknowledged by the authors. First, it is noted that it is difficult to extrapolate how representative this sample is, as it is unknown how many LGBTQ students exist on campus. Another limitation cited was the lack of actual retention data from participants. Third, data was not collected longitudinally. A fourth significant limit recognized by the authors is that only one institution is studied, limiting the findings, and soliciting questions of generalization. It should be added that in addition to these findings, the demographics indicate that as it refers to racial identities of participants, there is little to gather from students of color from this study, given that a total of 16% of participants identified other than White. Even more notably, zero students identified as African American in this study.

In Garvey, Sanders, and Flint's (2017) *Generational perceptions of campus climate Among LGBTQ Undergraduates*, the authors utilize data from the National LGBT Alumni Survey to examine perceptions of campus climate throughout several generations, from the years 1944-2013. The authors used Renn and Arnold's (1995) reconceptualized ecological model, of development theorizing out how "students' experiences are a result of the interaction between unique environmental systems in

which they live and interact, emphasizing peer culture and student environments” (p. 797).

Data was collected from a total of 3,121 total participants who had identified as “LGBTQ or another minoritized sexual or gender identity and who received an undergraduate degree from an accredited nonprofit college or university” (p. 799). The participants were pulled from an existing, broader data set collected throughout the United States, advertised by an electronic flyer. Of the participants, the authors note that 56% identified as men, 30% as women, and 7% identified as a non-binary gender identity. 71% are noted as identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, 19% as queer, pansexual, and fluid, while 3% identified as another sexual identity. From a racial perspective, 79% were White, while 20% identified as People of Color.

In addition to utilizing a quantitative approach, Garvey, Sanders, and Flint (2017) also integrated narrative responses from participants by way of open-ended questions. The authors’ findings were illuminating. First, it was found that perceptions of campus climate have improved over time, identifying 1998 as the first year in which a positive value was found among the mean standardized score for perception among participants. Second, the researchers found that academic training was “the most significant academic predictor for LGBTQ campus climate perceptions among graduates,” meaning that the more a participant felt academically prepared by their institution, the more likely they were to have a healthier view of campus climate. Third, graduates who knew more LGBTQ students perceived the climate to be better than those who did not. Fourth, those who did not have supportive peers or open access to resources on campus had more negative perceptions. Fifth, participants reported having more positive perceptions based

in particular geographical locations, with urban areas seeing the highest levels of positivity. Last, while the researchers acknowledge this needs to be explored more, they found that holding leadership positions and being involved in cocurricular activity had a negative correlation with perceptions of climate. That is, for those who were involved and/or in leadership positions, they were more likely to not have positive perceptions of climate.

Several limitations exist in this study, as recognized by the authors. First, as it is hard to know to what degree the sample was truly representative of all LGBTQ graduates, as there is limited information on how many LGBTQ students exist. Second, Garvey, Sanders, and Flint (2017) acknowledge the lack of diversity within the sample, as the majority of participants were white, men, and recent graduates. With this, the authors questioned how the demographics reflect those outside of the dominant participants. Third, given that this survey was distributed via an anonymous survey, there was no way to track duplicative responses. Finally, an inherent limitation the authors acknowledge speaks to the time span in which participants graduated from college. Given that some participants graduated more than 70 years before, there was no way to control for 1) the developmental differences within respondents and 2) the ability for each respondent to recall their experiences clearly.

In Karen Nakamura's *Transitioning on Campus: A Case Studies Approach* (1998), Nakamura conducted an anthropological investigation using narratives to create a case study exploring issues faced by transgender students. It is not known how many students participated in the study, or the demographic information of the participants. Specifically, Nakamura categorized data into three sections: (a) peer issues such as

bathrooms, residence halls, and campus violence; (b) faculty issues such as classroom interaction; and (c) administrative issues such as health care issues and name and gender changes in paperwork.

In regard to peer issues, such as bathrooms, residence halls, and campus violence, Nakamura identified several findings. First, significant issues were found in the areas of bathroom utilization, with transgender students stating that they felt unwelcome and as if they were targets for violence. This was especially true for male to female transsexual and transgender students. Competing privacy issues such as women seeing bathrooms as a refuge from predominantly male spaces were also mentioned. As a recommendation, Nakamura suggested speaking with a student to establish a plan for potential confrontations and informing campus officials so they understand the situation if called to an incident. Second, in reference to residence halls, privacy was again identified as being a key issue for both transgender and non-transgender students. This created an especially difficult housing assignment process, where many campuses currently struggle to find ideal and appropriate accommodations for transgender students while transitioning from one gender to another. The author recommended that transitions to different halls or rooms are best done over semester breaks, and they be guided by a students' preferred living situation. Last, it was found that peer problems regarding violence on campus is an issue that needs to be handled with a "zero tolerance" policy and tracked for any biased incidents regarding transgender students. Nakamura added that staying proactive rather than reactive allowed for better campus outcomes.

In regard to faculty and staff concerns, training on transgender issues was emphasized, as faculty and staff often lack knowledge about transgender issues and,

therefore, are likely to unintentionally create an environment where transgender students do not feel welcome. It's especially important for faculty to avoid mistakes, such as using a wrong pronoun, because they serve as role models for students and can convey an incorrect standard. Because of the power differential involved, this dynamic can be especially frightening for a transgender student; Nakamura suggested that transgender students be accompanied when speaking to professors or department chairs when and if issues need to be addressed.

Last, administrative issues, such as name and gender changes on official forms, should be handled by allowing students the ability to change their name and/or gender on official forms; thereby, creating an affirming campus environment. Health care was another issue. Case studies revealed that providing such benefits as counseling and hormonal treatment were not only appreciated, but also vital to participants' "mental hygiene."

Nakamura concluded by stating that student affairs professionals, faculty, and administrators have the responsibility to create inclusive environments for all students, including transgender students. While all transgender students have different needs, working towards the previously stated recommendations can help to establish successful relationships among all members of the campus community.

McKinney (2005) conducted a qualitative study examining how transgender undergraduate and graduate students perceive climate on their campuses using a phenomenological approach. In total, 75 participants filled out a survey, with 42 identifying as female, and 33 as male. Fifty students were undergraduates, and 25 graduate students.

Within undergraduate students, respondents reported that faculty and staff on their campuses were not educated about transgender issues, programs, and resources for addressing transgender issues on their campuses were lacking, and counseling for transgender students on campus was also lacking. Graduate students expressed the same sentiment about faculty's lack of education about transgender issues, inadequate counseling services, and lacking or inadequate health care trans-supportive campus groups.

In *Objects of Curiosity: Transgender College Students' Perceptions of the Reactions of Others*, Rob S. Pusch (2005) used a qualitative methodology to investigate and build a grounded theory on how transgender college students understood their identities through others' perceptions. Pusch solicited volunteer participants in this study through listservs for young transgender adults in which they engaged in web discussions of transgender issues. In all, 10 participants fully took part in this study. No demographic data was provided.

Common themes emerged from the participants. First, they discussed dealing with the disapproval of others; participants stated that their family and friends' disapproval had an impact on their identity, as did others' inability to support their preferred pronouns or gender identity. Second, many participants stated that not all support was considered supportive. The idea of intent versus impact was a common theme, with some participants recalling instances where others thought they were being supportive of them, but were actually the opposite. Asking too many questions and asking offensive questions were other examples given by participants. Last, respondents discussed how friends were

often most supportive by “ushering” them through means of passing, in different social situations, socializing, or undergoing repeated courses of hormonal treatments.

Rankin’s (2003, 2010) studies of campus climate served as not only the first and most robust studies, able to compare data across institutions of higher education, but also as a pillar around which this study will be built. Rankin’s studies have served to lay a foundation for the understanding of the current state of climate for LGBTQ students across the nation.

Brown and Gortmaker’s (2006) research, meanwhile, showed that issues of identity and “outness” have an influence over perceptions of climate on campus and in the residence halls. While many gaps remain, such as addressing the differences in experiences for those with more than just one identity outside of the majority, this study was an important foundation for researchers and practitioners to build upon, as it emphasized work yet to be done in this area.

Brown (2004) cited several implications for future research and practice, mainly differential training and programming for students is needed to maximize effectiveness in the learning development of students based upon academic class and sex. The second relevant implication was that each institution needed to complete its own assessment of campus climate, as each institution has variables that can significantly affect the climate that vary from one institution to another.

Vaccaro’s (2012) study highlighted the importance of the consideration of microclimates in studying the climate for any underrepresented group. With each social identity presented, different aspects of their lived experiences impacted their perceptions of climate. This served as a reminder to staff, faculty, and administrators that what one

underrepresented group needs is not necessarily what other underrepresented groups need.

Work by Tetreault and colleagues (2013) noted that perceptions of climate tended to be lower for those who had experienced unfair treatment by faculty, those who have hidden their identities, and those who lost emotional support from friends as a result of their identity. Given the inherent nature of a student's daily life, these experiences make sense as having a significant impact, and should serve as a guide for staff, faculty, and administrators to continue to view their work through the lens of students' everyday experiences and how that impacts their perceptions of climate on campus.

Garvey, Sanders, and Flint (2017) highlight the progressive nature of perceptions of climate for LGBTQ students, and how, while it may seem hard to see at times, perceptions of climate continue to improve. The authors make special note of how sociohistorical markers, such as the Stonewall riots, death of Matthew Shepard, and others significant to the LGBTQ communities, mark the way in terms of community memory.

Nakamura's (1998) study illuminated the breadth of issues faced by trans\* students while transitioning on campus. These issues hold value for staff, faculty, and administrators in the way that not only is it important to understand the needs of trans\* students, but also the needs of those students who are actively in the process of transitioning.

McKinney's (2005) study highlighted the lack of support trans\* students perceive from faculty, counseling services on campus, and other support mechanisms, based on a lack of understanding of the issues. This perceived knowledge gap brought to light a

question of how inclusive LGBTQ+ services and support on college campuses are towards transgender issues.

Pusch's (2005) study provided a glimpse into how transgender students construct their own understandings of their identities, through interactions with others, via a listserv web discussion. While only examining this issue at a surface level, this study provided an initial window looking into relational challenges that trans\* students may face on campus, in negotiating their own self-concepts while managing the implicit and explicit bias' of others.

### **Residence Hall Climate**

As stated, the climate and culture of the overall institution carries weight into the climate and culture of the residence halls on campus, mainly by way of values, beliefs, and other such social artifacts that community members live within. Rankin's (2010) study on campus climate for LGBTQ students and staff found that LGBTQ respondents have more negative perceptions of campus climate than their heterosexual counterparts, as well as those who identify as transmasculine, transfeminine, and gender non-conforming, in comparison to those who identify with the gender binary.

Residence halls often serve as sites in which students have their first significant experiences on campus beyond orientation and can have an impact on the overall climate and culture of the greater university. Residence hall spaces serve as sites of cultivation for climate and culture with many first-year students living within them and contributing to the climate and culture throughout campus, whether this is positive or negative (Astin, 1984). Students apply assumptions and stereotypes from their hometowns to what they have learned from other students in and around classes within the first few weeks of

class. Because residence halls can have an influence on the climate of the greater university, it is vital for campus administrators and practitioners to understand the climate of residence halls on their campus. Additionally, because many students live in residence halls for their first one-two years on campus, their experiences there can set the tone for the rest of their collegiate experience. Evans & Broido (2002) identified with their findings that climate in residence halls for LGB students was multi-dimensional and impacted by factors such as the characteristics of the hall, visibility of out staff members, a lack of negative events, inclusive programming, and signs of support for LGB students.

Kaya (2004) examined how residence hall climate impacted students' adjustment to college. Kaya stated that a positive experience in a residence hall aides in strong social and academic development for students, and provides a strong transition to college. To conduct this study, Kaya (2004) administered a questionnaire to 1,296 first- year students living in co-ed residence halls at a large public university in the southeastern United States in two phases via the internet for the first of two phases. The phases began (a) in the third week of the spring semester, after it was felt students should be settled into life at college, and (b) three months later when students could reflect on their adjustment to college. The first questionnaire was completed by 378 students, while the second was completed by 245 students. Of the 245 participants, 82% were Caucasian, 7% were African American, 6% were Asian American, and 5% were Hispanic, numbers which were representative of the community in which these students lived in on campus. No information was collected on students in regard to sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. The researchers utilized the Residence Hall Climate Scale (RHCS) during the first phase of the study to assess perceptions along a 7-point Likert-type scale, and the Student

Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) during the second phase to measure self-perceptions of adjustment.

Kaya (2004) found that “group cohesiveness in residence halls was an important factor for students’ adjustment to their collegiate environment” (p. 112) and that more specifically “higher levels of interpersonal closeness and feelings of connection among students in residential settings elicited better overall adjustment, social adjustment, and institutional attachment” (p. 112). Also within the social category, it was found that belonging and well-developed relationships with peers within the halls also contribute to group cohesiveness.

Kaya’s (2004) study measured climate in residence halls and its impact on adjustment to college, highlighting what was important for students to experience to best be set up for a successful collegiate career. However, it was not without its limitations. The first limitation was its small sample size and the fact that it was completed at only one institution. Further research would benefit from larger sample sizes and replication at several different kinds of institutions. Kaya’s study would be well-suited, in fact, to measure how the residence hall experience impacts adjustment to the collegiate environment for underrepresented students of all kinds, including LGBTQ students. Secondly, Kaya’s utilization of the two different instruments may have affected the outcomes in unknown ways, whereas the use of both methods in both phases or only one instrument in both phases may have led to more accurate results. Finally, Kaya’s study lacked a theoretical framework. Without this, it was difficult to understand the paradigm through which the author engaged this research.

Evans and Broido (2002) conducted a study in which they examined climate in the residence halls for lesbian and bisexual women by asking three questions: (a) How do lesbian and bisexual women experience living in college residence halls?; (b) What aspects of residence hall living were supportive for lesbian and bisexual women and what factors were not?; and (c) What strategies might enhance the residence hall climate for lesbian and bisexual women? (p. 31).

Taken from a constructivist perspective (Schwandt, 1994 in Evans & Broido, 2002), the researchers sought to allow respondents to describe their experiences while avoiding predefined responses, and to encourage them to make meaning of their experiences by utilizing open-ended interview questions. The constructivist perspective focuses on the personal meaning made by that of the participant (Schwandt, 1994). The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and were conducted by trained interviewers, who used a guide of questions in addition to follow-up questions relevant to what had been disclosed by participants. Evans and Broido conducted the interviews in the fall of 1995 through the fall of 1996 at a large eastern research university, located in a small, conservative town. The authors also identified that the institution, while having an active lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) student organization on campus, had no dedicated center or professional staff whose primary purpose was to support LGB identified students. The sample size was composed of 10 women total, five identifying as lesbian, and five identifying as bisexual. All participants were enrolled full-time and had lived in the residence hall or lived in one the year before. Limited information was included about the identities of the women beyond their sexual orientation.

Participants included two women who were studying abroad from England. All participants were White, and they all varied on their level of outness, with two out to only a few people, seven out selectively around campus, and one who considered herself to be completely out. There were also varying degrees of involvement with the LGB student organization on campus. Data was analyzed utilizing inductive coding (Strauss, 1987), and interpretive coding (Mishler, 1986).

Evans and Broido (2002) found that perceptions of climate in the halls ranged from supportive to hostile among the participants. Interestingly, support was mostly defined by participants as a lack of problems and negative comments, while hostile climates often manifested themselves as emotionally violent, with one participant stating, “I think for the most part women are less physically violent than men would be. Women tend to talk behind people’s backs. They’re more emotionally violent...I think in a lot of ways, emotional violence is probably worse” (Evans & Broido, p. 34). After collecting the data, Evans and Broido created a taxonomy of themes, breaking off findings into several categories: (a) characteristics of the hall, (b) experiences, (c) interactions, and, (d) students’ behaviors. With respect to the characteristics of the hall, the researchers found that knowing out staff members were present in the hall contributed to more positive perceptions of climate, as did halls that held more of a focus on academics. In regard to experiences, lack of negative events contributed to positive perceptions of climate, as did inclusive programming, signs of support for lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. Data relating to interactions revealed that the support of the student’s roommate was critical in how participants perceived climate. Lastly, behaviors by the individual participants also contributed to perceptions. More specifically, the researchers found that those who were

not out and were not as involved on the floor had more negative perceptions, while those who were out and more involved on the floor reported more positive perceptions.

This study provided an insight to the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women but did have several limitations. The first limitation was that the information provided on the participants made no mention of identity beyond sexual orientation. Without this information, it was difficult to know whether or not additional identities could have impacted the experiences of participants. Additionally, the researchers were direct about the halls in which participants lived in being either single-sex by floor or single-sex by hall. While this was appreciated, this provided only limited insight into the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in halls and floors that were all co-ed.

Evans et al. (2001) conducted a qualitative interview of 20 LGB university students that examined their perceptions of their Resident Assistants (RAs) in relation to their own perceptions of residence hall climate. Through these interviews, the researchers found that the RAs were highly influential in the students' perceptions of climate. Those LGB students who perceived their residence hall climate to be positive typically had an RA who was supportive, open, accepting, and able to facilitate a positive climate, while those students who had RAs that did not encompass those qualities reported perceiving a more negative climate.

These studies speak to the importance of fostering inclusive environments for students who identify as LGBTQ+. Without environments where LGBTQ+ students feel welcome, safe, and included, they are not likely to succeed at the levels of their peers. As Rankin (2006) stated, not only does perception of climate for underrepresented students

appear to influence the degree of engagement with the learning enterprise, but it also has the potential to impact the educational and developmental outcomes for college students.

Kaya's (2004) findings on the importance of group cohesiveness and feelings of connection to a student's successful adjustment to college demonstrated the influence on students' experiences in a residence hall has on their time in college. Evans and Broido's (2002) study highlighted the different types of incidents that contribute to students' perceptions of climate within their residence halls. Lastly, Evans, Reason, and Broido's (2001) study illustrated the influence student staff such as RAs can have over the experiences of LGB students in residence halls. These studies directly apply to my study by not only providing an understanding of current studies on the topic of residence hall climate, but assisting with the formation of my research questions and interview protocol.

### **Safety**

As seen in Kaya's (2004) and Evans and Broido's (2002) studies, perceived and real safety has a significant impact on the perceived climate for all students. As LGBTQ students are often more vulnerable to violence and harassment, it is even more influential to their experiences on campus. Rhoads (1995, 1997) conducted an ethnographic study to explore the culture of gay and bisexual male students at a major research university. Examining the experiences of these young men to inform how to improve campus climate for them, Rhoads utilized participant observation, formal and informal interviews key informants, and document analysis through the ethnographic process. Rhoads interviewed a total of 40 students, 32 of which identified as gay, and eight of which identified as bisexual. Most of the participants, Rhoads noted, were juniors and seniors in class standing.

Rhoads found that young men faced many challenges in their coming out process, and concomitantly, their identity development in three major ways: coming out, visibility, and harassment and discrimination. The coming out process was noted by Rhoads as being a specifically significant aspect of identity development, as many participants noted continual choices they would need to make about being visible, and more vulnerable to harassment and discrimination. Participants also noted that their choice to come out was made easier by connecting with a social network on campus of other LGB individuals that was supportive and visible. A lack of LGB role models among staff and faculty on campus, on the other hand, made the students less likely to want to come out.

Visibility, another concern put forth by participants, impacted students' engagement in campus life. Specifically, students stated that the invisibility of LGB people prevented them from getting involved in opportunities on campus, and limiting their access to economic, social, and political organization on campus and in society. It was also noted by participants that this invisibility seeks to further limit the heterosexual world's understanding of the lives of LGB people. Finally, issues of harassment and discrimination were consistent in participants' contributions to the study. Rhoads speaks to the violence his participants identified, stating:

Ben has a scar beneath his eye from the time he was beaten up at a party eerily because he commentated on the attractiveness of another man. Tito was harassed continually by fellow students in his residence hall. And Andrew was assaulted by several fraternity members. In fact, each of the 40 gay students I interviewed reported constant fear. One said, 'it's just something you learn to live with' (1995, p. 2).

One student in the study alarmingly pointed out “In a way heterosexism hurts more than homophobia. When someone says something or does something homophobic they at least acknowledge you exist. With heterosexism, someone is refusing to acknowledge your existence- you remain invisible” (1997, pp. 278).

Rhoads’ (1995, 1997) study identified very real issues faced on students, even to this day, in addition to the importance of student affairs practitioners, administrators, and faculty working to improve campus climate and support students. This included advocating for LGB students in the presence of community issues, and creating spaces, programs, or services to identify LGB role models. Finally, the value of all members of a campus community working to educate each other on LGB issues, was imperative, as this relieves the pressure of LGB (and ostensibly, T and Q students) to educate others on how to support them.

Rhoads’ (1995, 1997) identified significant issues faced by gay and bisexual male students on campus. Future research in the same form as Rhoads’ would benefit the collective understanding of other subcultures, including lesbians, female bisexuals, and transgender students. One limitation of Rhoads’ study was its lack of transparency on aspects of the ethnography completed outside of the participant interviews. Several questions remain on how and where the participant observations, document analysis, and key informants were completed. Finally, a lack of demographic information on the participants in the realm of race and/or ethnicity leaves unanswered questions regarding whether or not additional identities held by participants had an impact on his study.

Palmer (1996) studied the perceptions of RAs and their supervisors (referred to as Resident Directors [RDs]) at 12 different institutions regarding incidents of violence in

the form of vandalism and verbal harassment, which victimized students and staff in residence halls. In addition to examining their experiences, Palmer assessed the descriptions of violence, frequency of which they occurred, the roles of factors that played into the violence (alcohol and drugs), reporting rates, reasons for non-reporting, and search for suggestions of how to prevent the violence within residence halls. Palmer noted that a “broad range of incidents that victimize students occur in campus residence halls (p. 268),” due to the diversity of the student makeup within residence halls, the after-hours interactions between students, and the higher levels of alcohol consumption. The importance of including this study in this literature resides in these reasons, for it highlights the influence of residence halls on all students’ experiences.

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase one included written surveys that the RAs and RDs filled out. In phase two, interviews were conducted with the participants. The total number of participants was 374. In total, 5,472 incidents were reported, with 2,386 being directly targeted at RAs (Palmer, 1996). The demographic information for participants was as follows: 58% of the participants were women, 82% were white, while 9% identified as African American, and 9% identified in the study as other racial or ethnic groups. The residential floors the participants served on were 32% all men, 45% all women, and 23% coed. Finally, the average residence hall population for the participating institutions was 318 students.

It was found that incidents of violence were more often reported than harassment (Palmer, 1996). Additionally, alcohol related incidents were reported as accounting for 71% of incidents, while harassment numbers totaled the following: 20% verbal, 12% vandalism and 4% verbal and harassment (Palmer, 1996). Based along gender lines,

Palmer found that violence against women usually manifested itself in the way of rape or sexual assault, dating violence, or assaults from ex-partners. Additionally, it was found that 88% of the violence committed against women was perpetrated by men, and that 90% of the violence against women was committed by one person, whereas 53% of violence against men was committed by two or more perpetrators (Palmer, 1996).

This study had several limitations. The first limitation was that it did not study any aspect of identity other than gender. Even so, this in itself can be flawed as it did not seem to view gender as a social construct, but rather binary based upon assumed sex. Additionally, another limitation was the lack of specification about the different types of institutions that participated. Not knowing what kinds of institutions at which this study was conducted limits the assumptions that can be drawn from the results of this study, as it was unknown whether or not this sample was applied to any residence hall population. An additional step of recommended examination for this was to examine the number of incidents between small residence halls, and large residence halls, as large residence halls can often have a quality of anonymity.

Fanucce and Taub (2010), examined the relationship between LGBT and non-LGBT students' perceptions of homonegativity in residence halls and how that relates to climate. Fanucce and Taub define homonegativity as "negative attitudes toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals." This study examined 284 undergraduates at a large Midwestern university by utilizing both the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Residence Hall Climate Inventory (LGBTRHCI) to assess perceptions of climate for LGBTQ students and the Residence Hall Climate Scale (RHCS) to examine

how all students perceive their residence hall experiences. It should be noted that the authors identified no theoretical framework used as a guide in the research process.

Of the participants, 41.5% identified as male, 50% as female, and .04% as transgender, while 8.1% did not disclose. The breakdown of the sexual orientation of the participants included 83.5% heterosexual, 9.8% gay/lesbian, 3.5% bisexual, and 3.2% identifying as uncertain. The researchers also collected information on the identifications of the heterosexual students, finding that 44.3% of the heterosexual students identified as allies, with 38% identifying as non-allies, and 17.7% not reporting. Last, the ethnicity demographics of participants are as follows: 2.5% African American, 6.0% Asian/Pacific Islander, .04% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 86.3% White, and 2.9% undisclosed.

The researchers found LGBT students did report experiencing higher levels of perceived homonegativity. In addition, it was found that the higher the level of perceived homonegativity, the greater the negative perceived residence hall climate. These results speak to how LGBTQ students may have a harder time connecting to their peers in the residence halls, and feeling safe, as they are more likely to perceive their environment as unfriendly, and at times unsafe. Fanucce and Taub (2010) stated “LGBT students’ personal safety perceptions are especially impacted by homonegative attitudes when hate crimes and gay bashings continue to populate the news and heterosexism continues to remind LGBT students of the low social status imposed upon them” (p. 35).

While this study provided valuable insights into LGBT students’ perceptions of climate in their residence halls in regard to homonegativity, which was directly connected to safety, it only gathered data at one institution. This disallowed conclusions to be drawn

from residence halls across the country, as it was unknown how representative this institution was of the larger population.

For any person, regardless of identity, safety is paramount in any situation. Without feeling safe, no one can feel comfortable living their everyday lives, let alone succeed in an academic environment. Rankin (2006) stated that perception of climate for underrepresented students appeared to influence the degree of engagement with the learning enterprise and had the potential to impact the educational and developmental outcomes for college students.

Kaya's (2004) and Evans and Broido's (2002) studies displayed how perceptions of safety can influence perceptions of residence hall climate for LGBTQ students. These studies both illustrated how fundamental safety was in relation to climate. This in turn, assisted in the formation of my research questions and interview protocol. In my interview, to gauge the extent to which participants feel safe within their residence hall, I ask "Have you witnessed any acts of harassment towards anyone in the hall (yourself included) based upon their LGBTQ (or assumed LGBTQ) identity?"

Palmer's (1996) study also displayed how fundamental safety was to climate by highlighting the frequency of violence in residence halls for staff members. While the focus of my study is on LGBTQ students in residence halls, there are important connections between safety of staff within residence halls and how safety informs perceptions of climate between LGBTQ students. Witnessing or hearing about violence or threats of violence impact more than just the victim. Fanucce and Taub's (2010) study spoke to perceptions of homonegativity, and its many consequences such as violence. This study drew attention to how outright violence can impact students' perceptions of

climate, and more subtle indicators such as the perceived attitudes of others can impact it. With this in consideration, my study endeavored to capture experiences from participants that are both direct and indirect in nature.

### **Policies**

Policies play an important role in campus climate in the way that they “out” the institution’s values beliefs and expectations for its members.

While it may not be immediately obvious as to why policies on a college campus can affect climate for LGBTQ students, it is imperative to note that campus administrators set the tone for what is and is not acceptable through not only their own actions, but also through policies. (Erdmann, 2009, p. 26)

Change, Rankin (2003) stated, “demands committed leadership in both policy and goal articulation” (p.6). Brown and Gortmaker (2006) added that “changes on campuses are unlikely to ensue unless administrators and staff first challenge their own beliefs and recognize their personal contributions to the campus climate” (p. 614). Through each of these, visibility is increased, and role modeling of support of LGBTQ issues is displayed to students (Erdmann, 2009). As a result, campuses are uniquely situated to serve as a space where acceptance and appreciation of diversity are the rule, not the exception (Erdmann, 2009).

In their discussion of how nondiscrimination policies impact climate on campus, Sanlo and Zemsky (2005) stated that “academic environments inhospitable to LGBT students, faculty and staff provide opportunities for negative acts such as discrimination, violence, and marginalization, and have also stilted scholarship, teaching, and outreach in the pursuit of knowledge about LGBT lives” (p. 7). Sanlo and Zemsky also drew upon a

symbolic understanding of policies as indicators that institutions are committed to equality for all members of the community. Later, they made the case for how the location of the institution matters, as state nondiscrimination policies impact climate on campus and serve as having a lasting effect for community members, as many may make their decisions to be out on campus around these policies.

Sanlo and Zemsky (2005) described direct effects of nondiscrimination policies that include sexual orientation. The first of which was that policies serve as a fundamental step to providing services to LGBT students, noting that of campuses they assessed who had LGBT centers, all were located on campuses that had sexual orientation specifically mentioned in their nondiscrimination policy. The second effect the researchers described was a door-opening effect, wherein nondiscrimination policies in campus literature served as indicators to staff, students, and faculty that they were supported and valued by the institution. As an extension of the value and support felt, Sanlo and Zemsky stated that the denial of equal protection through these very nondiscrimination policies can lead to a chilling effect on whether students, faculty, and staff choose to be open about their identity on campus. These effects are especially important for student affairs practitioners, faculty, and administrators to reflect upon, as it is through their work that policies are changed on campuses and the climate is thus impacted for all.

While Sanlo and Zemsky (2005) addressed policies with LGBT students, it should be noted that the experiences and needs of trans\* students do not necessarily complement those of lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer students. Because being trans\* is not synonymous with being homosexual and trans\* as people can identify across a wide

spectrum of sexuality and orientations, trans\* students need to be advocated for in different ways. Sausa (2002) spoke to some of the ways transgender students out themselves in different ways—applications, housing arrangements, safety, use of pronouns, and more. Sausa also noted that because of these special circumstances, institutions of higher education needed to examine how they could be oppressing and encouraging people to stay in the closet in subtle ways, and work to be more inclusive through using more inclusive language, creating of safe environments for trans\* people, promoting the awareness of transgender issues, and establishing accessible resources on campus.

One significant limitation for this particular strand within this literature review was that there is no empirical research available on how policies can impact residence hall climate for LGBTQ students. Sanlo and Zemsky's (2005) and Sausa's (2002) research highlighted the importance of policies in relation to climate, but more data-driven research needs to be conducted. This was a driving force for why I have included questions about policies within my interview protocol. More information is needed to understand the degree to which students place importance on these policies and how the policies impact climate.

### **Student Services and Programs**

Climate on campus and in residence halls can be influenced by programs and services offered, just as anywhere else on campus. Because education and experience are key variables in the fight against homophobia and heterosexism on campus, it is imperative that student affairs practitioners working in residential life can effectively lead programming efforts to better educate students on LGBTQ+ issues.

Many campuses today utilize programs such as “Safe Zone” and “Allies” that offer visible support and education to members of campus communities about LGBTQ+ issues (Draughn, Elkins, & Roy, 2002), but they fall short in addressing ways in which community members can actively take a stand against heterosexism and homophobia on campus. Additionally, they state that a lack of on-going training methods also short-changes the programs in the long run.

Campuses utilize a variety of programs and services offered on campuses and residence halls for LGBTQ students and allies. These can range from mentoring services, to leadership programs, to support groups, to activism groups. The effectiveness of these programs is dependent on many variables, including type of institution, needs of the students at the institution, skills of the organizers and many more. Without going in-depth on the plethora of programs and services available, two emerging concepts are growing increasingly popular on campuses across the country—gender inclusive housing and living-learning communities.

### **Gender Inclusive Housing**

Gender inclusive housing, a current trend in residence halls, is a housing system based upon no assumptions being made about the gender identity of students living in the hall. Currently, gender inclusive housing is being used at institutions across the country as a means to steer away from traditionally heterosexist assignments policies. Gender inclusive housing also comes in direct opposition to *in loco parentis*, as historically, residence halls have been gradually loosening their grip on assignments for living arrangements, with many housing arrangements being made as separate for men and women and often on opposite sides of campus even 40 years ago, while many colleges

today are exploring gender inclusive housing accommodations (Carroll, Clark, Marshall, & Willoughby, 2009). The verdict is still out, however, on the impacts of gender inclusive housing on campuses—with many proponents saying that it reduces heterosexism within college policies and creates more diverse communities (Carroll, Clark, Marshall, & Willoughby, 2009).

### **Living-Learning Communities**

Living-learning communities are residential communities that are focused on a theme or academic discipline. Living-learning communities are regarded as “high-impact practices” (Kuh, 2008). Many LGBTQ+-themed learning communities are popping up all over the country, each a bit different from the other, but all seeking to better educate students on issues of sexuality, orientation, gender expression, etc., and provide a safe haven for students who are either in the process of coming out or have come out already. Terenzini, Pascarella, and Blimling (1996) found that living-learning programs aimed at academic development are generally successful, and produce stronger academic outcomes among participants. Murphy and Pasque (2005) add to that, noting in their study on the influence of living-learning programs and their influence on academic achievement of students that LGB students benefit positively (in regard to academic achievement) from living-learning programs.

Herbst and Malaney (1999) conducted a study on the 2-in-20 program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst to assess the perceived value of a residence hall space for students interested in gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender concerns. To conduct this study, the researchers provided participants with open-ended questionnaires that addressed their expectations before living in the community and their perceptions of

success for the community. The 22 participants completing the questionnaires consisted of current students in the community. Six staff within the community also participated, and did so by completing interviews with the researchers. Beyond the breakdown of staff versus residents, no other demographic information was collected.

While Herbst and Malaney (1999) did not identify a theoretical framework from which they approached this study, special mention was made of Earnest Boyer's (1990) six principles of community was integrated into how the researchers defined community. These six principles include shared learning, openness, justness, discipline, caring, and a celebration of tradition and heritage. Added to these principles by the researchers based on the unique nature of the population were safety and personal comfort.

Herbst and Malaney (1999) found that overall, student participants' and staff participants' expectations and perceptions of success were split. While reactions to the program were mainly reported as being positive, staff felt the program provided a positive environment for the students, while student participants were not quite as enthusiastic about the effects the community has had. Staff also reported feeling comfortable in the environment and that they had felt they gained valuable training and preparation for their roles. Student respondents mainly agreed with this, but did include a handful of students who were clearly dissatisfied with the overall program. Both the students and the staff agreed that two limitations of the community were a) insufficient staff, and b) a lack of outreach to the greater campus community.

While this study served as a comprehensive assessment of the 2-in-20 program, it was limited in several ways. The first of its limitations falls within instruments used. Utilizing a questionnaire with students and interviews with staff may have skewed data,

as both instruments may have been asking different questions, thus rendering them unable to appropriately be compared. Additionally, because identity is a key factor in this study and any such residential community, it would be worth examining what the demographics of the participants were. It seemed as if a core group were dissatisfied, and it is possible that these are students who are not having their needs met based upon differing identities, such as transgender students.

Just as policies serve as artifacts through which institutions are “outed,” so do services and programs on campus and within residence halls. Services and programs are tools many practitioners utilize to serve as informal curriculum in the holistic education of students. These reflect the values of the institution, and serve to not only aid students with their development, but also as symbolism for what the institution believes valuable to instill in its students. This influence is reason to consider deeper examination of services and programs in relation to climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students.

Participants in my study were not specifically selected from communities such as the ones described above. However, some participants did happen to live in a similar community. No direct questions were asked about this within my protocol, but it was expected that experiences from these communities would emerge from participants who are members of those communities.

### **Summary**

The literature reviewed provided an outline of the relevant research in the area of residence hall climate for LGBTQ+ students. Because of the limited research within this specific area, it was imperative that the information was contextualized within the greater campus setting. Currently, research suggests that the climate for LGBTQ+ students

broadly on campus and within residence halls is chilly (Evans & Broido, 2002; Rankin, 2003). As the literature above demonstrated, however, certain sub-populations of LGBTQ+ students – namely white, cisgender gay men and lesbians – have been studied more in depth, leaving the important question of the experiences of LGBTQ+ students of color, trans\* student, queer students, and those with multiple oppressed identities. Trans\* students in particular have suffered from what Z. Nicolazzo (2017) refers to as the “trans\* paradox” – that “although trans\* people have become increasingly socially visible, we remain highly invisible throughout educational research” (p. 42).

The intention of this study was to pursue an understanding of what the perceived climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students is, and also what policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive perceptions of climate within the residence halls. This study was conducted in a qualitative context, allowing for both breadth and depth of data from LGBTQ+ students at a large Research 1 institution. It is my intention that this study will inform future research and practice for student affairs practitioners, campus administrators, and faculty.

### **CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

Chapter three presents an overview of both the conceptual framework under which this study was conducted, and the methodology used to conduct this study. The research questions guiding this study are revisited in this chapter. A queer theoretical framework was utilized in this study to guide subjects' experiences through a lens of difference from their heterosexual peers. Lastly, this chapter describes the design of the study, along with a description of the participants, procedures and instruments used in this study, as well as a description for how the data was analyzed.

#### **Queer Theory**

To guide this study, a queer theoretical framework was utilized. Queer theory emerged as an academic movement in the late 1980s among conferences at institutions such as Yale and Harvard where scholars began to link grass-roots politics to a new way of theorizing about gay and lesbian studies (Stein & Plummer, 1994). Queer theory was developed on the premise that the theory was not about "queer things," but "queering things" (Dilley, 1999), meaning to "analyze a situation or a text to determine the relationship between sexuality, power, gender, and conceptions of normal and deviant, insider and outsider" (p. 458). Based upon this, Dilley added, the sexuality of a subject was only relevant through positioning its queerness to the norm. Queer theory stood against normative constructions by challenging the idea of strict binaries in an effort to further conversation over many important issues in education such as access, diversity, success, and climate (Renn, 2010).

Queer theory's foundation was built from the concepts of "difference" and "other" (Dilley, 1999; Kumashiro, 2000). Pinar (2003) described queer theory as the way

in which they realized that the democratization of America can go no further until the system of privilege based upon white male superiority is ended. Dilley (1999) also spoke to the notion of privilege and how queer theory was in direct opposition to this and any other binary concepts, stating that "...even words are gendered, and through that gendering an elliptical view of the hierarchy of society, and presumption of what is male and what is female shines through" (p 460).

Dilley (1999) outlined three main tenets of queer research, including the review of non-heterosexuals' lives and experiences, comparing those lives and experiences to that of those considered "normal," and inquiry into how those lives and experiences are differentiated from those considered "normal." This study focused primarily on the first two tenets, examining how the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ students in residence halls differ from that of their heteronormative peers and how those experiences influence their perceptions of climate.

Utilizing queer theory allowed this study to view the educational experiences of LGBTQ+ students from a perspective of change-oriented education grounded in difference. Because many LGBTQ+ students can experience oppression in multiple ways in society—education included—a queered perspective is needed in order to focus on forward-thinking solutions to how educators can improve conditions for LGBTQ+ students both in and out of the classroom. Kumashiro (2000) stated that educators should not ignore the differences in their students' identities, nor should they assume that their students are all "normal or neutral" (p. 29), but that they should recognize and affirm these differences, modifying their teaching according to the student population they serve.

Queer theory allowed for the consideration of how sexuality is classified as the “other” within many contemporary and historical systems, including education. Capper (1998) stated “Studying the sexual culture and structure of schools and organizations can provide insight into how sexual norms, rituals, ceremonies, and other artifacts of culture and structure serve particular individuals at the expense of others and maintain hetero(sexual) hegemony” (p. 360). Understanding how these cultural artifacts impact the experiences of LGBTQ+ students is paramount if equity-based education is sought. Its roots are grounded in an effort to “move away from psychological explanations like homophobia, a term that individualizes heterosexual fear of and loathing toward gay and lesbian subjects at the expense of examining how heterosexuality becomes normalized as normal” (Britzman, 2005, p. 214). Approaching this study from a queer theoretical perspective allows administrators and practitioners to identify the inequity in which the experiences of LGBTQ+ students are shrouded and to be able to begin to work towards ways in which these inequities can be addressed.

In previous research, queer theory had been used in a variety of ways. In the field of education specifically, queer theory was often used in qualitative research, with methods that allowed for narrative and the telling of personal stories. Using queer theory gave participants a voice through which their lived experiences were heard through the heteronormative fray. Additionally, it was quite often used in education research as a method by which researchers examined and highlighted the effects of systems of privilege and oppression on LGBTQ+ individuals in schools and on campuses (Dilley, 1999).

Utilizing a queer theoretical framework in this study allowed the experiences of LGBTQ+ students in residence halls to be seen through the framework of a system in which they experience oppression within residence halls, and how this impacts the participants as students. The data collected in this study is oriented in a way that seeks to collect information about the experiences and needs of current LGBTQ+ students in higher education in comparison to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts and their thoughts on how change might be accomplished to take all students, regardless of identity, to a place of inclusion and equity in higher education. Doing so required questions to be targeted in a way that would capture the lived experiences of participants, taking into consideration their lives inside and outside of the educational system so as to provide a comprehensive picture of how oppression impacts their lives both inside and outside of the classroom. Both the research questions and questions that were asked in interviews were geared toward gathering data on how participants experience climate in their residence halls based upon their differing identities. This was done through probing questions that were expected to have answers that vary across identity. The most overt way through which queer theory was utilized in my study was through analysis of the data. Using a queer theoretical lens to collect and analyze data allowed me to make recommendations to practitioners and administrators which keeps “difference” at the forefront. Recommendations are made in a way that reinforces that not all students have the same needs, and that not all presumed identities are exactly alike.

### **Research Questions**

Current literature in the field led to many possible questions for this particular study. Most literature in the field investigates climate for students on campus in general,

without narrowing down different factors of their experiences and how this impacts their perceptions of climate or why it matters. What interested me most was not just how LGBTQ+ students perceive climate in their respective residence hall to be, but also, what experiences contribute to these perceptions. My hypothesis was that negative perceptions of climate in residence halls are influenced by acts of harassment, discrimination, violence (overt or discrete), etc., as well as a lack of supportive programs, services, and policies. Positive perceptions on the other hand, are linked to strong communities in the residence halls, supportive peer relationships, and peers who are involved in the community, as well as a visible presence of supportive programs, services, and policies.

To guide an exploration of the perceived climate in residence halls and the experiences that influence this perceived climate, this study asks the following questions: (a) How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate?, (b) What experiences have contributed to their perceptions? and (c) What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls? These questions were developed through a current understanding of the literature in this field with a consideration of gaps in the literature, and with an eye toward the appropriate methodology to be used when exploring the answers to these questions.

### **Method**

This study utilized a qualitative approach, allowing for the lived experiences of participants to shine through and providing the reader with personal testaments to their experiences in the residence halls. Students' identities and experiences are deep and complex and cannot be fully understood with numbers. For this reason, qualitative measures were the most fitting form of methodology. Interviews are intended to provide

the individual perspective and illuminate the lived experiences of the participants. What follows is an outline of the various components of this study, including the design, participants, procedures, instrumentation, analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations of this study.

### **Design**

This study utilized a qualitative methodology in its search to learn more about participants' lived experiences. Qualitative methodology is defined by Creswell (2007) as a methodology that involves “the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and the places under study and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 37).

This study employed a blended approach, using phenomenology and grounded theory (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) for research questions (a) How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate, and (c) What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls were phenomenological in nature. The design of these questions therefore pursue, as Starks and Trinidad (2007) share, “the meaning and common features, or essences, of an experience or event. The truth of the event, as an abstract entity, is subjective and knowable only through embodied perception” (p. 1374).

Grounded theory, on the other hand, was used to address research question (b) What experiences have contributed to their perceptions, due to the theory's emphasis “on how social processes are constructed and constrained by the physical and social environments in which they are practiced” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p.1375).

Semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect data in this study. Interviews, defined by Borg, Gall, and Gall (2007) consist of “oral questions asked by the interviewer and oral responses by the research participants” (p. 228). Utilizing interviews in a semi-structured format allowed for both consistency in ensuring that baseline questions were asked of all participants, and flexibility in allowing me to ask probing follow-up questions based on the context of the information provided. Further, these allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ lived experiences in residence halls, and provided depth in conversation about the experiences of participants: what they have encountered, how it has impacted them, and so on. Interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and transcribed for analysis.

### **Participants**

This study was conducted at Lakeland University, a large Research-1 institution in the midwestern United States. In order to obtain permission to conduct this study, I submitted a research protocol for approval to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which ultimately deemed this study to meet the criteria for exemption. Additionally, I worked with members of various offices at the institution in key campus departments to assist in promoting the study and recruiting participants on department email listservs. These key campus departments included residence life, the campus’ gender and sexuality center, multicultural center, women’s center, and the gender and women’s studies department.

Recruitment of participants was focused on a purposeful sample of participants. Creswell (2007) defines purposeful sampling as a strategy used when “the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of

the research problem a central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). In the case of this study, it was important that I focused on LGBTQ+ participants in the interview stage of this study as their experiences are the ones I needed most. These participants self-identified as LGBTQ+.

All potential participants received an introductory email with information about the study (Appendix D). They were then asked to contact me if they had an interest in participating in the study, and were given information about the background of the study, intent, and incentives, as well as provided with selection criteria to confirm. To take part in this study, participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Participants were currently enrolled undergraduates in their first four semesters at Lakeland University.
2. Participants lived in on-campus housing for at least two months within the last year.
3. Participants must self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

A total of 28 interviews were conducted. The sample size of participants fulfilled several functions. First, if assuming that approximately 10% of the population is lesbian, gay, or bisexual (Kinsey, 1948), Lakeland University’s undergraduate population of LGBTQ students would rest around 3,100. Interviewing 28 total students put the number of LGBTQ students interviewed at just under one percent of this sample. Additionally, the sample size naturally provided a degree of diversity among all participants in respect to sexual orientation, gender identity, race and more, within reasonable bounds of Lakeland’s overall demographics. Obtaining this representation of identities among

participants had the effect of accurately depicting perceptions of students from a wide spectrum of identities, rather than inaccurately assessing findings to all identities.

Data were collected from an array of participants who were diverse with regard to social identities beyond LGBTQ+ identities, such as race and ability. Chapter 5 provides more information on the demographic breakdown of participants. While the structure of my study limited the depth to which different identities could be thoroughly examined, it did provide a view into how intersecting identities affect perceptions of climate. The concept of intersectionality, originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1988, speaks not only to the existence of multiple identities, but also examines how those identities intertwine to inform an individual's experience.

### **Procedures**

To address the research questions, I utilized a qualitative methodology, through semi-structured interviews. The research questions are as follows: (a) How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate? (b) What experiences have contributed to their perceptions? and (c) What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls? As stated earlier, interviews were conducted in order to gather a rich depth of data.

Interviews were set up after I received email inquiries from interested participants, based on the email advertisement in Appendix D. Participants were acquired through the use of purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), with key campus departments at Lakeland University assisting in promoting the study primarily through email listservs. The goal of the study was that approximately 25-30 interviews would be scheduled with individual participants. Upon receiving email inquiries from interested students, I

responded to confirm they met the selection criteria, coordinate logistics, and share the informed consent form prior to the actual interview for their review.

Participants were notified that interviews could be conducted at the location of their choice, including options such as reserved rooms on campus, study lounges, or coffee shops. For participants' convenience and privacy, room reservations were made at various locations within residence halls and academic buildings, in the event participants preferred a space with maximum privacy. One participant chose to meet in a public space in a coffee shop on campus. The other 27 participants chose to meet in the reserved rooms on campus. Before beginning each interview, I provided time for each participant to review the consent one final time, and sign if comfortable. Once the consent form was signed, I began recording. Before going into questions, I wanted to ensure that myself and each of the participants were on the same page, and they understood fully what the parameters of their participation were. For each interview, I reminded the participants of focus of the study, reinforced the voluntary nature of the study, and explained how their privacy was being maintained. Last, I collected a pseudonym and demographic information.

Participants were asked questions about their perceptions of climate on campus related to the research questions. Semi-structured interviews (Borg, Gall & Gall, 2007) were used in order to provide a brief outline of questions, followed by follow-up questions to further inquire about participants' answers. The interviews all lasted approximately one hour, with some variance provided for amount of information shared by the participants. With participant consent, interviews were recorded and later transcribed by myself, using the software program Temi.

## **Entry**

To contact participants, I made initial contact by sending an email (Appendix D) to all potential participants through email lists provided by key campus departments at Lakeland University. This email provided an introduction to the study, along with its intent, incentive, and notice that the study was voluntary.

The nature of this study required collecting data that is sensitive in nature. It was imperative that I gained the trust of participants, as well as maintained the highest ethical standards for their safety and privacy. Because of this, it was important for me to be consistent in the messages I provided pertaining to the purpose and intent of the study. To do so, I thoroughly explained the purpose of this study, the precautions being taken to protect their privacy, and how it was hoped that the findings of this study would be used to better understand perceptions of climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students and the experiences that influence these perceptions.

## **Analysis**

In this study, I used several means to analyze the data collected. The process of taking extensive notes throughout the course of conducting this study lent itself to strengthening the analysis, and ultimately conclusion, through credibility. Constant comparative method was used in order to continuously categorize, compare and analyze the data collected from the study. Constant comparative method is defined as “the process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories” (Creswell, 2007, p. 64). Utilizing this method allowed me to continuously compare and categorize the data I collected by taking notes during interviews to help ensure I reached a saturation point (Creswell, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews (protocol displayed in Appendix B) were designed specifically with the current literature review findings and the tenants of queer theory in mind. Questions asked of participants were developed in line with questions asked in similar studies (Evans & Broido, 2002; Herbst & Malaney, 1995). However, they also challenged former studies by searching for how the experiences of LGBTQ+ students are different than their non-LGBTQ+ peers. Additionally, in this study, a positioned-subject approach was utilized to interpret data, allowing participants to define how they understand their own experiences (Conrad, Haworth, and Millar, 2001). Utilizing a positioned-subject approach matched well with the use of a queer theoretical framework, as it allowed for participants' own meaning-making of their experiences, in a way that allowed me as the researcher to not feel constrained to fit my findings into clean categories. One example of this includes how two participants in particular, Sydney and Royalty, made meaning of difficult situations they encountered within their communities, and how those informed my findings, by my following the meaning they made of their own realities, rather than trying to force those examples into a neat category.

Utilizing a queer theoretical framework was paired with phenomenology and grounded theory methodologies in pursuit of understanding participants' lived experiences. Starks and Trinidad (2007) situate this concept: "In phenomenology and grounded theory the researcher engages with the analysis as a faithful witness to the accounts in the data" (p. 1376). It was precisely in laying "faithful witness" to the experiences of participants that I as the researcher was able to analyze participants' experience to that of their non-LGBTQ+ peers and examine the ways in which systems impacted their differing identities.

After conducting the interviews, I transcribed the interviews personally using the software program Temi, whilst searching for common themes that emerged from the data. Rigorous analysis was completed using the constant comparative method to code for common themes. Specifically, data were coded for themes to assist in making sense of the data. Coding, defined by Borg, Gall & Gall (2007) is defined as a “method of data analysis in qualitative research in which segments of data are assigned to one or more categories” (p. 634). I began with open coding, which served to separate data into its major categories of data (Creswell, 2007), and later move on to axial coding, which allowed me to make connections among the data and prioritize major themes (Borg, Gall, & Gall, 2007). Utilizing open and axial coding provided me with the opportunity to categorize and summarize the data according to participants’ responses. In utilizing a blended methodological approach of phenomenology and grounded theory, I primarily utilized grounded theory’s processes of open and axial coding, and was assured in my use of one approach due to each methodology’s emphasis on commonality and common themes towards findings in analysis (Starks & Trinidad 2007).

To code the data, I used Microsoft Word to put the transcriptions into a table format, creating a column on the left-hand side of the transcript, in which I could mark codes. Tables were later copied into Microsoft Excel, where I could sort by individual participant codes and group participation codes. Then, I initiated axial coding, in which I was able to identify connections among the data, as well as identify the major themes.

### **Trustworthiness**

Upholding the trustworthiness of this study was important to me for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the integrity to this study, and the sake of future

research in the area of LGBTQ+ concerns. I ensured validity in this study through the use of several different methods. Borg, Gall, and Gall (2007) define process validity as addressing “the adequacy of the processes used in different phases of research, such as data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and whether the triangulation of data sources and methods was used to guard against bias” (p. 610). The first method I employed in the write-up of this study and during interviews with study participants was to utilize researcher reflexivity (Creswell & Miller, 2000) in order to clarify my own bias and extrapolate on my own experiences and how they lent themselves to this study. Specifically, I used this strategy in both the write-up of this dissertation, as well as in disclosure to my participants before interviews began. It was important that the participants hear from me about my own experiences as a White trans\* man (and former queer person); my former position as a staff member at the institution; and my intent to conduct this study in order to help better understand how residence halls can become more welcoming places for LGBTQ+ students. Second, to ensure the data I collected represented the experiences of the participants and can inform future research and practice, particular attention was paid to the research process. Through conducting the interviews, transcribing, coding, and analysis, I listened to, read, re-read, and reflected on the data often throughout the process. Third, I utilized member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000) throughout the interviews, paying particular attention to confirm what I heard participants sharing, to ensure I was fully and accurately capturing their perspectives. Fourth, I searched for disconfirming evidence in the analysis of my data, ensuring that I was not missing important trends or themes, or that any disconfirming evidence did not outweigh confirming evidence in this study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Finally, I made it a priority to constantly reflect at all points in this study to analyze whether any changes need to be made, or extra precautions taken to uphold the integrity of this study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Because of the sensitive content of this study, all precautions to protect participants were taken. Interviews were voluntary, so those not comfortable disclosing their identities would not be forced to participate. The voluntary nature of the interview was also reinforced at the start of the interview, so that all participants understood that no penalty would result if they stopped early or did not answer a question. The interviews were conducted with the highest level of sensitivity. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form (see Appendix A) before actively participating in the study. This included a brief description of the study, what it would be used for, and benefits to them as participants. In addition to the informed consent form provided via email before the study, I covered these topics with participants in person before their respective interviews. In the event any of the participants were in need of campus resources as a result of any negative emotional consequences from what the questions in this study elicited, I provided each participant with a full list of support resources on campus, along with contact information. Pertaining to electronic privacy, I was sure to maintain audio files in a secure location, and only labeled with de-identifying information, including participants' pseudonyms. Last, I followed all Institutional Review Board policies and procedures in order to cause the least amount of harm to any of my participants.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The objective of this chapter will be to summarize my findings. To do so, I will first provide a brief reminder of the study methodology and research questions. This will be followed by a discussion of the institutional profile of Lakeland University and participant demographics to provide context for the variety of identities represented in this study and a brief discussion of the variables relevant to this study. Additionally, I will provide an overview of participants' broader stories, values, and initial perceptions of Lakeland University. Last, I will present and discuss findings of major themes presented in the data.

### **Overview of Research Procedures and Research Questions**

As outlined in Chapter Three, I conducted 28 interviews using an hour-long, semi-structured protocol with undergraduate students at Lakeland University. Student participants were recruited by purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007). To participate in the study, participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Participants were currently enrolled undergraduates in their first four semesters at Lakeland University.
2. Participants lived in on-campus housing for at least two months within the last year.
3. Participants must self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

Each participant provided consent to the interview through the use of the informed consent form in Appendix A. Upon completion of the 28 interviews, each of the

interviews were transcribed and coded in preparation for analysis used to determine and present the major themes discussed in this chapter.

Research questions guiding this study are: (a) How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate? (b) What experiences have contributed to their perceptions? and (c) What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls?

### **Institutional Profile and Participant Demographics**

Lakeland University is a large, research institution located in the midwestern United States, enrolling approximately 31,000 undergraduates in the Fall of 2019 (Lakeland University, 2019). Similar to the surrounding community, Lakeland is a predominantly White institution (PWI). In the Fall of 2018, the enrolled student population by race/ethnicity at Lakeland University, according to Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) provisional data (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/InstitutionProfile.aspx>) is listed below in Table 1.

Table 1

#### **Lakeland University Percentage of Enrolled Students by Race/Ethnicity**

<b><i>Race</i></b>	<b><i>%</i></b>
White	67
Asian	6
Hispanic or Latino	5
Two or More Races	3
Black or African American	2
American Indian or Alaska Native	0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders	0
Unknown	2

The diversity of representation among participants in this study were largely reflective of the broader institution. Appendix C provides the raw information by

individual participant by pseudonym, along with their self-disclosed pronouns, class year, sexual orientation, gender identity, and race. I felt it important to allow participants to use their own terminology regarding identity, in order to honor the personal nature of identity. Below, Tables 2-6 provide a percentage breakdown of participants based on disclosed identities, as well as class year and what area of campus they live on.

Table 2

**Class Year Breakdown of Participants**

<i><u>Class Year</u></i>	<i><u>Count</u></i>	<i><u>%</u></i>
First Year	18	64.3
Sophomore	9	32.1
Junior	1	3.6

Table 3

**Area Breakdown of Participants**

<i><u>Area of Campus</u></i>	<i><u>Count</u></i>	<i><u>%</u></i>
Downtown	7	25
Lakeside	21	75

Table 4

**Identity of Participants by Disclosed Sexual Orientation**

<i><u>Sexual Orientation</u></i>	<i><u>Count</u></i>	<i><u>%</u></i>
Lesbian	3	10.7
Gay	6	21.4
Bisexual	9	32.1
Queer	5	17.9
Pansexual	1	3.6
Between Lesbian and Queer	1	3.6
Pansexual/Bisexual	1	3.6
Gay/Androsexual	1	3.6
Straight	1	3.6

Table 5

**Identity of Participants by Disclosed Gender Identity**

<b><u>Gender Identity</u></b>	<b><u>Count</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>
Female	8	28.6
Female?	1	3.6
Cisgender Female	1	3.6
Cisgender Woman	2	7.1
Femme	1	3.6
Male	5	17.9
Man	2	7.1
Cisgender Male	1	3.6
Transgender Man	1	3.6
Transgender Male	1	3.6
Non-Binary	2	7.1
Gender Queer	1	3.6
I Don't Know/Male	1	3.6
No Gender Personally; Female Politically	1	3.6

Table 6

**Identity of Participants by Disclosed Race**

<b><u>Race</u></b>	<b><u>Count</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>
White	18	64.3
Caucasian	2	7.1
Black	1	3.6
African American	1	3.6
Asian	3	10.7
Hispanic	1	3.6
Latin X/Caucasian	1	3.6
Asian/White	1	3.6

Lakeland University's housing department predominantly houses first-year students, with a small percentage of sophomore students, juniors, and seniors, across approximately 20 residential communities. All residential communities are traditional-style residence halls comprised of rooms ranging from singles to quads. Lakeland's housing facilities are nestled within two distinct neighborhoods across an extensive footprint – one with a decidedly quieter, lakeside feel, and the other in the more urban

part of campus closer to the downtown area, fraternity row, and nightlife. For the purpose of identifying areas in which participants live, I will refer to these different neighborhoods as “lakeside” and “downtown.” The last important distinction to understand in reference to the structure of the residential communities is that of the residential Living Learning Communities (LLCs). Lakeland University hosts approximately ten LLCs, one of which will be referred to as the gender and sexuality-focused LLC. This LLC will be referenced extensively, as approximately 40 students live in this community each year. Several other LLCs are referenced as well, each of which will be described in general language as they appear in the following sections.

### **Overall Findings**

Through the collection and analysis of interview data, I have identified the following major themes: (a) Positive Overall Perception of Climate, (b) Peers as Primary Influence on Perceptions, (c) Locations Informing Assumptions and Experiences, and (d) Indicators of Inclusion. Each theme is further broken down by sub-themes to illuminate the myriad of participants’ experiences which informed their overall perspectives. As an important note, the presentation of data collected here by way of a queer theoretical framework gives voice to participants’ experience through rich description, so as to closely honor their insights, and highlight the distinctive differences between their experiences, and those of their heterosexual and/or cisgender peers.

Before framing the major themes which emerged from this study, I am providing a brief overview of trends regarding participants’ experiences and assumptions coming into Lakeland University. The purpose is to contextualize where participants saw themselves upon entering Lakeland University, their overall impressions of Lakeland

University and the surrounding city, and to inform how their contextual histories informed their perspectives of climate within the residence halls.

### **Previous Experiences and Assumed Knowledge**

Participants in the study varied in their identities as well as their histories. The predominant driver for participants to attend Lakeland University was the strength and breadth of academic offerings, in addition to the institution's reputation for academics.

When asked about their level of outness to their families, all participants indicated they were out to at least one or more member of their family. Some participants indicated that they were selective about this, choosing to withhold their identity from one parent, extended relatives, and so on, usually due to concerns over how those family members would react or family history. A majority of participants also discussed being out in high school, and often indicated negative consequences for doing so, such as bullying, bias, or judgement. When these stories emerged, it was made clear by participants how these experiences informed their selection of college, as well as thought process on how and if they were out about their identity, as well as in what manner, and in what circles.

In addition to referencing the academic, location, and financial draw to Lakeland University, participants spoke frequently of their understanding of Lakeland as being a liberal institution located in a progressive city. As an extension of this knowledge, participants often indicated this was both a point of attraction for them in their discernment to apply to Lakeland University, as well as a reason by which they felt they would be able to be open upon arriving to college. Participants shared that they knew from friends or relatives that the city Lakeland is located in is generally progressive,

viewed primarily through the existence of political activism, as well as the number of LGBTQ+ people in the city and on campus. Jane described this in the following way:

I knew that [Lakeland] in general was a place of like a lot of forward thinking protests and stuff and, even just walking down [redacted] street, there's a bunch of bookstores with pride flags in the window and stuff. So, it's from just sort of like a cursory glance, it's pretty easy to tell that y'all are pretty chill here.

In addition to speaking to their knowledge of Lakeland University's (and by extension, the surrounding community's) liberal culture and progressiveness, participants often expounded upon this by adding that they had a high degree of confidence in institutional support, should they be in a situation where they needed direct support.

Evlea echoed the same feeling as Jane above, and added her confidence in institutional support:

Yeah, I didn't really know any specifics but I always knew that [Lakeland] is kind of considered more liberal compared to especially other colleges. And so I kinda knew that they had an emphasis on diversity and accepting different races, different sexualities. So I did feel more comfortable cause you know like if I were to go to a private Christian school I probably wouldn't be as open to just like being who I am compared to here. I know that even if I, if someone were to treat me bad, I wouldn't like... they would get in trouble for it, you know?

Several participants spoke to how much of their perspective coming into Lakeland University was informed by where they are coming from. In other words, participants who were from areas which they characterized as more rural and conservative tended to speak more often about their view of Lakeland as more liberal and progressive. Adriana

explained this succinctly: “I think if you come from a rural community, going to [Lakeland] is a big, big change. But if you come from more progressive community, you won't see it as much.” Ben, a student coming from a rural community within the state Lakeland is located, shared:

I knew that it was, they were, it was a place that was accepting of my identity where I could be out a lot more. And I, don't know, I just knew that it was an overall liberal city and thought it would give me a lot of new experiences with the community. I had never even like met a transgender person.

Participants from larger cities than the one Lakeland is located in, generally viewed Lakeland and the surrounding city as liberal, but not to the same degree as the places that they came from. Sydney, a transfer student from a large research university in Boston, shared an anecdote with her former advisor in which her advisor explained Lakeland as “hippy” and “really liberal”. Sydney further shared:

I think I can get behind that. That's fine. Like, how liberal is liberal? Really? So I was like, so it's not that far off from Boston, but like I didn't know anything about how they support LGBTQ+ people here.

Beyond the division of participants from rural versus urban areas, one stark point of difference regarding participants' views of the degree to which Lakeland is a liberal, progressive institution is that participants of color often remarked how their expectations were not met upon their arrival to campus. Lakeland, while being known for being progressive, remains a predominantly White institution (PWI). Connected to this, participants throughout the study, regardless of identity, often commented that the diversity of Lakeland University is one of the lenses through which they view climate in

residence halls for LGBTQ+ students— and by extension, campus. Specifically, participants referenced the overall composition of campus based on race, as well as their perception of how Lakeland's administration provides resources to underrepresented students and responds to bias incidents on campus. Ann shared:

I thought it was, well, I thought [Lakeland] was a lot more liberal than it actually appears when I'm here. I don't know, it always seemed very inclusive and um, I don't know, they always seemed like they had stuff when they have [LGBTQ] Pride, which shows that they care. I don't know...that helps, like, I don't know. Um, cause I want to go somewhere where I feel safe and welcome.

Elena echoed this same sentiment:

Hmm. I knew that coming in there was a lot of.. I knew it was a very heavily white school, if that makes sense. And that kind of worries me because I feel like this is just based off my experience with living different places. But when you have a more diverse community of ethnicities and race usually there tends to be more acceptance because you have to kind of deal with different types of people. Yeah. But when I was learning that there was going to be just a very strong singular population and also it's a really big football school, party school, which means like frats and sororities. I was like, what does that mean for minorities and LGBTQ plus and, you know, my family is Hispanic and I don't look it, but I was still like, that's a community I'm comfortable with.

Finally, as it pertains to participants' views of campus before arrival, one trend that stood out was that participants who identified as trans\* more often referenced researching Lakeland, from the application process through orientation, to investigate its

friendliness toward LGBTQ+ people. This trend tended to be in stark opposition to those practices of their lesbian, gay, and bisexual peers. Leo shared:

I did ask a couple of people about it at SOAR and at tours and stuff, what's the friendliness for LGBT students because that's important to me. And they also that it was pretty friendly and I probably wouldn't have problems.

Noah detailed his own process of research on the institution:

I had looked into a bit what they could do for transgender students, not even because identified as trans at the time. Um, but because I had a friend and she was trans and she was really struggling and she's in [city near Lakeland] but all of a sudden I was just looking through university resources and so I knew that you know, I mean as far as like official policy goes, they were very accepting.

In addition to doing general research on the LGBTQ+ friendliness of Lakeland, trans\* students often cited their knowledge of the gender and sexuality LLC as being a significant factor in their decision to attend Lakeland. The existence of this community served as an indicator of the institution's dedication to inclusion for LGBTQ+ students. Philip shared their experience of picking between Lakeland, and a small-liberal arts college in a major city approximately 4 hours away from Lakeland whose gender inclusive housing had been closed by the time he inquired. Philip stated: "I can just go live in [redacted], in the [gender and sexuality LLC] in [Lakeland]. So that was actually a factor when I came here. It was like the learning community seemed like it would be a positive environment for me."

### **Overall Positive Perception of Climate**

Data collected and analyzed in this study present an overall positive perception of climate in the residence halls for LGBTQ+ students at Lakeland University. Participants shared predominantly positive experiences.

Many participants spoke of the inherent challenges and vulnerabilities of living in such close proximity with other students, but this did not ultimately lead them to perceive a negative climate. Participants also juxtaposed this with acknowledging that while the close proximity was a concern for many, there were also significant benefits such as there being no better way to make friends and develop social connections within the community.

While there were exceptions to the overall positive perceptions by way of one-off negative moments, participants qualified these stories by framing the overall climate as being positive in general. Leo shared: “I really enjoyed living in the residency [*sic*] halls as an LGBTQ+ person. I haven’t had any problems and it’s been...safe. It’s been nice. And I mean, the things I deal with are just the things of daily life.”

Speaking broadly, students in LLCs reported fewer negative experiences to inform their overall perceptions of climate, as did students identifying as cisgender lesbian, gay, or bisexual, compared to their trans\* counterparts. With regard to overall perceptions of climate, participants often referenced the overall perception of Lakeland University’s progressiveness, supportive peers, resources both within the residence halls and across the broader university, and more. Participants described the campus and residence halls overall as “queer friendly,” and noted the connection between their perceptions of campus to the residence halls and vice versa.

Policies were referenced sparingly by several participants, who were often primarily aware of non-discrimination policies on campus, how and who to report issues to, as well as a relatively new bathroom use policy. Participants who were aware of these policies reported more positive perceptions of climate overall, and a greater confidence in the system, should issues arise. In other words, participants aware of policies to protect LGBTQ+ students felt Lakeland would support them, should they experience any mistreatment for their identity by anyone in the community.

The next themes offered below will provide a rich description of factors informing participants' perceptions of climate, as well as provide context to those experiences out of step with positive perceptions – most often involving factors including microaggressions, alcohol, and a lack of adequate bathroom and shower facilities.

### **Peers as Primary Influence on Perceptions**

Through the collection and analysis of data, the strongest theme which emerged was that of peer influence on a participant's experiences and perception of climate in the residence halls – contributing to both positive perceptions and negative perceptions. Drilling down deeper into the primary theme of peer influence on participants' perception of climate and experience in the residence halls, several sub-themes emerged: (a) Affirmation through seeing oneself in others, (b) Experiences with roommates, and (c) Microaggressions and bias.

#### ***Affirmation Through Seeing Oneself in Others***

Participants remarked often on how they saw the opportunity to live in the residence halls as a chance to be in a space where they could get to know more LGBTQ+ students similar themselves. This theme was particularly prevalent for those participants

hailing from rural areas before arriving at Lakeland. Participants often remarked about how they felt a level of affirmation in their own identity by meeting other LGBTQ+ students within the residence halls, and stated that this was a significant reason for why they decided to reside on campus. For some students, a sense of power in numbers contributed to feeling more comfortable to be themselves, in the sense of there being more power in numbers. Bill shared the value in seeing other LGBTQ+ people not only in the residence halls, but within his classes as well. He remarked that, after attending a high school where he was one of only a few LGBTQ+ folks, it “was just kind of reaffirming to see other people like yourself.”

For other students, building connections with others over common identities had made an impact on affirming the identities of others, as well as themselves. Nick shared:

I had some of my friends on the second floor come out to me actually, at the beginning of this school year because they felt safe with me. And they knew I would understand what they're going through to some extent. And it just...it made me feel really hopeful. And just good that people can trust me and that they are a part of the community and they feel like they want to express that.

Most often, cisgender participants conceptualized their “normalcy” in the eyes of their peers as validating. Students mentioned that the idea of being “celebrated” would not feel comfortable for them, but that being treated as any of their peers would be treated was most affirming. Jay explained:

When I um, came out to my roommates and they were both super chill, that was great. And then I guess like any subsequent.. if I talk, I think I was talking about someone and I was like “oh yeah, like she’s really cute.” Everyone was like, “Oh,

are you gonna ask her out?” and I was like, Oh, how supportive, of you. No I’m not but thank you for asking. It was like...it was like, the fact was that was handled in the same way that anyone else [talking] about like a crush that they had would have been handled. It was nice cause it was like okay, like, to y’all this is normal and it was just nice.

Jane echoed Jay by sharing:

You don’t have to continuously point out like yeah, I really enjoy being a lesbian and I enjoy being part of this community, but it’s.. it’s not the only important thing about me. We don’t have to focus on that. It’s just kinda how it is. Being like, “Oh my gosh, your eyes are blue. That’s so amazing. I’m so proud of you for having blue eyes”. We don’t have to talk about that. It’s just how it is.

For participants of color, seeing oneself in others was made more complicated given Lakeland University’s PWI status. Sydney gave voice to how holding intersecting identities, for example, complicates one’s ability to see themselves represented among their peers and the power in realizing this:

I hoped I’d get to meet other queer black femmes because there’s a shortage, not a shortage, but just not a lot. And that’s just cool to have people like to talk with. And yeah, cause like the black community itself can be pretty homophobic sometimes, so it’s kind of hard to like find where you fit in so I kind of hope for that and I kind of did get that...I have a lot more queer friends now living in the [performing arts LLC].

Trans\* participants, and those outside of the more heavily represented cisgender lesbian, gay, and bisexual orientation identities referenced, expressed needing from their

peers a more complex understanding and capacity to learn about their identities to feel affirmed. Zoo, a trans\* participant who lives in the gender and sexuality LLC, shared his experience with his roommate, another trans\* student, upon disclosing his asexual identity. Zoo shared how both he and his roommate, while both identifying as trans\*, have vastly different personalities – Zoo being more reserved and introverted, and his roommate more extroverted. Upon placing his ace (a term often used as a shorthand way of saying asexual) flag, Zoo’s roommate asked him to explain it to help him best understand in order to be supportive. Zoo shared his appreciation for his roommate’s openness by stating, “Every time I would have a conversation with him he surprises me about how open he is to things that he does not get at all.”

For trans\* students who did not live in the gender and sexuality LLC, the perception of affirmation came primarily through the use of pronouns and the acceptance of those most directly around them, such as their roommate and floor mates. Leo, a queer student living in the lakeside area of campus, but not in the gender and sexuality LLC, shared:

The first experience that I had with my floor felt pretty safe because we introduced our pronouns right off the bat. You know what I mean? So we said our name and then we said our preferred pronouns if we felt comfortable doing that. And a lot of the... a lot of the girls on my floor said their pronouns even though they use she/her and that was very inviting because then, you know, it’s like they realize that not everyone uses she/her pronouns. You know, dependent wherever they are on the gender spectrum. So I kind of knew that they wouldn’t be shocked if I used they/them. You know what I mean?

While the use of pronouns provided a level of affirmation to trans\* students outside of the gender and sexuality LLC, several spoke to a feeling of alienation from their peers. This was referenced, in part, by the very binary nature of the residence halls – specifically, in segregation of rooms and bathrooms by gender. Further, for some participants, depending on where they lived and where they were in their own journey, it was more complicated. Noah, a trans\* man early in transition who lives on an all-women’s floor, shared:

I’ve avoided interacting with people because it makes me uncomfortable just because there’s that implicit agreement that it’s like an all-girls hall. I feel like even without that, like even if I lived in a hall that was coed, not passing and talking to people just makes me uncomfortable and nervous.

Noah’s story serves as a good example of how a person’s progress through different stages of their gender transition will have a direct impact on their experiences, especially if they identify as trans\*. Noah later shared:

It’s so weird and like...suffocating, I guess to just be in this weird headspace where you’re constantly self-conscious about like what gender people are perceiving you as. So just existing in a space where you know that you’re going to be perceived as a woman.

Leo, a non-binary participant, acknowledged the discomfort as well. While not feeling as alienated as Noah, Leo shared their feelings on the subject:

If you’re in a group of people and you identify as, let’s use me as an example, you identify as non-binary and everyone else is on a binary, you can have a feeling of, a little bit of like a sense of being left out.

Those opting to live in the gender and sexuality LLC overtly expressed that they needed to be surrounded by peers with more explicit and nuanced understandings of their identities to feel affirmed. This was expressed by all participants who lived in the LLC, but was more salient for trans\* students living in the community. For many students in this community, the idea of living in the residence halls was both exciting and fraught with anxiety over how they will be perceived by others, respected, affirmed in their identity, and more than anything – safe. Zoo served as an example of this, and expressed:

Yeah, I called and I was like, I don't wanna live anywhere else...I didn't feel safe going with a random roommate in a state that I'd never been to really. I've been to it, but to a school that I didn't know anyone at. In a dorm with public bathrooms and stuff like that. It was just too much. So I was...I have to make sure I'm in [gender and sexuality LLC] and around people like me.

Philip expressed how living with a roommate who identifies similarly has provided a peer group unlike what they had before arriving to Lakeland University:

In high school I felt like I was the only trans or only queer person besides cis white gay men who are... who was really high achieving or whatever. But then I came here and met other non-binary people or other queer people who also want to go to law school and want to change the world. And that was cool and affirming to see, oh, I can like do this. There are other people who are doing this.

Last, and also coming out of the gender and sexuality LLC, is the idea that affirmation from peers was a healing experience at times. For students in the gender and sexuality LLC, participants spoke about how the community rallies around its members to help heal after difficult situations. One example provided was how on move-in day,

move-in aides are mindful of how names and pronouns of students that are provided around their parents may differ once the parents leave, so move-in aides are trained to be prepared for these scenarios. Other times, parents of students who may not be out as trans\*, or may not be supportive of their child's identity will visit. This may cause the student to have to use their dead name (their former, given name) while their parents are around. Mary details a common scenario among their peers:

We've got some people who, when their parents come to visit, they have to use their dead name or have their dead name up on their door or um, stuff like that. Or they say, you know, "if you see me, like don't use my name" or stuff like that. So, um, it's nice living in a community where we can help people heal from that. You know, as soon as their parents are gone and it's like, hey, let's order pizza and watch some *Mean Girls* or something, you know.

### ***Roommates***

As the person participants spent the most amount of time with, it is unsurprising that roommates were often mentioned as having a significant impact on the experiences and perceptions of participants. The vast majority of participants interviewed indicated a positive experience with their roommate, and many extrapolated on how their relationship with their roommate is a significant factor in their level of comfort within their larger community. This was, at times, framed as a gateway to acceptance on the floor more broadly, and other times, a refuge from the community if something negative was experienced.

Participants whose roommates were supportive most often referenced conversations where they disclosed to their roommates and were met with responses that

were anywhere from indifferent, as the roommate did not see any concern, to instances that were overtly supportive. Jay detailed her feelings about both of her roommates' support, and shared a story of how thrilled her roommates were to help her put her pride flag in the window: "They were so aggressively onboard for that...it was just really funny and weird".

Participants shared their identities in a variety of fashions – many did so early on and unapologetically, so that there wouldn't be any surprises down the line. Robyn, as an example, shared with her roommate right away. As they did not know each other previous to coming to Lakeland, Robyn messaged her roommate on Facebook: "By the way, I'm part of the LGBT community and if you are uncomfortable, then we can't be roommates.' That's something that I made sure they knew right away."

Others looked for clues with their roommates, such as asking probing questions about their politics or their opinions on contemporary political topics, to gauge their level of openness. Royalty, coming off of a year where he was not open to his roommates due to his perceptions of how their religious identities may impact their openness toward him, shared his identity with his second roommate only after when, during a roommate agreement conversation, his roommate shared his views on discrimination: "He started explaining to me, how you don't...how he felt about...like no discrimination, none of this, none of that. And I'm like, okay, so maybe, you know, maybe this is okay."

Further, roommates were often cited as the single most significant point of apprehension in participants' journey into the residence halls – particularly if the participant did not know their roommate ahead of time. One way in which this manifested was in how participants remarked on their need to be vigilant about predatory

stereotypes based on their identities, most often with their roommates. Several participants referenced their own stress regarding the fears they had over whether or not it would be assumed that they would “hit on” one of their peers based purely on their identity. In other words, participants spoke to predatory stereotypes based on their identity. Allison remarked:

I get the feeling it’s not something even the people that are accepting, they don’t necessarily want to talk about it in the same way that like, if I had a boyfriend that we talk about, if I had a boyfriend, you know what I mean? It’s not just like, “Oh, is this your girlfriend coming over?”. It’s just... I’d have to be like “my girlfriend is coming over” You need to know.

For students referencing their fear of having predatory stereotypes applied to them, they shared how these thoughts occupied their mind when preparing to come to Lakeland. Greyson spoke to his feeling of responsibility to ensure others around him are not made uncomfortable by his identity when he shares: “I know I probably shouldn’t have to feel this way, but I feel like it’s my obligation to make sure that my, you know, sexuality doesn’t offend or make anyone else feel uncomfortable.” Renae echoed this and elaborated on the psychological impact this has on LGBTQ+ students preparing to live in the residence halls:

Yeah, it’s you know, I don’t want to have to think about it all the time and think about my actions and be like, am I making this person uncomfortable? But you know, I have to...so yeah. And especially being in the residence halls because you’re interacting with so many people all the time. It’s very emotionally draining.

Later in the interview, Renae again referenced the dynamic of living in the residence hall and shared:

Identifying as gay and being in this situation and having to deal with so many people all the time. And you know, like I said before, it's just...it's a conversation you have to have with yourself in your head that, you know, nobody else does, or other people don't around you as you kind of. Because you're interacting with so many people all the time. I'm kinda always monitoring my behavior and thinking about, you know, I'm always thinking about what I do or what I say before I say it... And that can be exhausting.

In addition to the fear of predatory stereotypes being applied to them, participants who did not know their roommate before arriving at Lakeland feared that their roommate would simply not accept them, be openly uncomfortable, and at the most extreme side of the spectrum, close-minded or hateful. Alex lived in a triple and shared his concern over how accepting his roommates would be, informing his decision to not disclose his identity to them. At the time of our interview, Alex was feeling mounting pressure to do so, but was still struggling with the fear of doing so:

Now I feel like it's at the point where it's so far into the school year that like, yikes, I need to come up with a reason to come out to them. So it isn't as awkward cause there's always the gnawing part in the back of my mind where it's ... "Oh they know and they don't like it." But also, it's 2019, almost 2020, nobody really cares. It's for the most part people are super cool with it. But you know, it's still just the... the feeling of what if they aren't okay with it and what if they get all weird?

While the vast majority of participants reported and enjoyed open and accepting roommates, the unfortunate reality for several participants was that they were unable to come out to their roommate due to fears of not being accepted. Often, these fears were based in factors such as participants' roommates identifying with a religion or political identity perceived as not accepting of the LGBTQ+ community. Royalty lived in a triple room the year prior, and shared his existing apprehensions about coming out to his roommates based on his natural tendency to not share intimate details about himself with others. When Royalty learned his roommates were both religious, he made a decision not to tell them, sharing his thought process as: "Maybe I shouldn't tell them. Maybe they'll feel uncomfortable and maybe if they do end up telling the [resident assistant], maybe I'll be the one to move or maybe they'll have to move." Bill spoke to his experience with his roommate who is a Trump supporter, and how that has essentially created a chilling effect in his room. When speaking about his level of comfort in his own room based on his roommate's Trump paraphernalia, Bill shared: "Just seeing it in my room. That's you know... it's our space. But, you know, it's my space too. So yeah, like when my space is kind of invaded by that... not the most comfortable."

For participants in the gender and sexuality LLC, anticipation and fear over whether or not they would be accepted by their roommates still existed to some degree but in different ways. Specifically, participants in the gender and sexuality LLC largely assumed that their roommate would be accepting of their LGBTQ+ identity based on the mission of the community. Siobhan shared:

The description of [gender and sexuality LLC] ...it's for anyone who wants to learn about gender or sexuality. But just in general basically everyone in [gender

and sexuality LLC] is LGBT. So it's basically just an assumption that your roommate is a safe place.

Apprehension primarily existed for participants in the community over identities outside of LGBTQ+ identities. This apprehension over other identities took on other forms, including fat positive identities, acceptance of asexuality, and other intersecting identities, which created a second worry of participants. Mary shared: "I was definitely nervous... I'm someone who's fat and they're a ballet dancer, so it was very different worlds. And I'm like, are they going to be fat phobic or are they going to be unwelcoming?"

### ***Bias and Microaggressions***

To varying degrees, the vast majority of participants shared stories of microaggressions and bias among their experiences. Fortunately, no harassment was referenced among participants as a result of their LGBTQ+ identity.

**Bias.** Experiences of bias often referenced language used among other students within the residence halls. Colloquialisms such as "that's so gay," "no homo," and jokes about gender expression and shifting cultural norms regarding pronouns such as "I identify as a pineapple," for example, were most often shared. When asked about the impact this language from their peers had on their perceptions of climate, participants most often shared that while this does not necessarily impact their perceptions of climate in the residence halls, these instances do serve as signals to them about whether or not it is safe to come out to their peers, and in what capacity.

In the fall of 2019, Lakeland University experienced a series of racial bias incidents that were very much on the mind of participants during the weeks of these

interviews. While participants did not dwell on these events, nor connect them directly to their experiences within the residence halls, these did inform the overall campus climate for all participants – most notably, participants of color. In Glucose’s words: “I’m a little shook. I did not know that there’s been kind of some race stuff going on recently.” Bias incidents on a campus-wide basis informed feelings of safety and comfort for participants in all areas of campus.

Similar to how incidents of bias felt to participants were experiences involving derogatory language overheard by participants. This was referenced as sometimes being anti-LGBTQ+ language specifically, and other times, not targeted at the LGBTQ+ community. While anti-LGBTQ+ language unsurprisingly cut deeper for participants, general derogatory terms and language provided a quick impression of participants’ environments. Jane explained this succinctly:

I heard someone use the “R word” to refer to something and it’s not particularly LGBT based, but just things like that... And like, I don’t know, from my experience at least people who tend to have some sort of bias towards one group or another tend to have similar biases towards others.

Within the residence halls, only one participant, Sydney, spoke of a potential residential community-level bias incident, involving a piece of cardboard with students’ names on it on the floor of her floor’s den – assumed to be the names of students identifying as LGBTQ+. Sydney shared the unsettling dynamic of learning about this, and the confusion over why the names were on the cardboard list, who they came from, and what the purpose of the names on the list were. In recounting the impact this had on her, she shared: “Not everybody’s at that stage. Some people are very comfortable and

other people haven't realized that yet." Sydney's story shines a light on the dynamic of intent versus impact. While the intent of the list is unknown, the impact is felt by those on the list, and there are no assurances that each of the students listed are comfortable enough with their identities to be listed on this list.

In the case of another hard-to-place incident, Royalty shared his dismay about hearing his next-door roommates yelling different derogatory words for gay men within their room, where Royalty can readily hear them through thin walls. Royalty spoke to how startling it was to hear them, and the personal conflict he encountered in deciding whether or not to approach his RA:

I'm not the confrontational type. I don't want to talk to her about it and then she talks to them about it and it's like, well who else would they be? Even if she doesn't name drop me, who else would they be referring to besides the people next to them?

Royalty's situation puts him in a difficult position – say nothing, and continue to hear words that impact you and degrade who he is – or say something, and risk further negative consequences.

**Microaggressions.** Microaggressions were often shared as wayward comments from LGBTQ+ students' peers that ranged in scope from assumptions of predatory behavior broadly, feelings of invisibility by students of certain identities, or confusion over certain intersecting identities such as asexuality or disability status. Bisexual students, for example, often spoke about how they felt invisible to others, overhearing comments such as an anecdote Gwen shared about common conversations regarding the speculation of others' identities:

If we're wondering if a person that passes by is gay or not, at lot of times people will say, "if not gay, at least bi," which is a uh...not very cool way to portray bisexuality as like an intermediary to being gay in between straight and gay and not like its own individual identity.

Ben shared an anecdote regarding his roommate, who let Ben know that he intentionally does not go to the bathroom with him at the same time and said, "I think he's a little bit more awkward around changing around me and stuff... he's said he doesn't go to the bathroom when I go to the bathroom because he's worried about that." Instances like the one shared by Ben were referenced from other participants as well, and illustrate assumptions and stereotypes LGBTQ+ students face on a daily basis.

In summary, participants point to peers as having a pivotal role in their experiences within the residence halls. Most often shared in how peers impact their experiences were: how they receive affirmation through seeing oneself in others, the experiences they have with their roommates, and their experiences around microaggressions and bias.

### **Locations Informing Assumptions and Experiences**

As it pertains to physical spaces, two distinctions were clear through the collection and analysis of data. The first is the division of perceptions of experiences based on neighborhood on campus. The second was the impact of LLC spaces, regardless of focus, and how those sites of learning impacted students differently compared to their peers who do not live in LLCs. Both are explored below.

### *Area of Campus*

Participants spoke extensively about their perceptions of how climate differs from one side of campus to the other. Participants spoke often about the “lakeside” area as having a more positive and supportive climate for LGBTQ+ students, and the “downtown” area as not being quite as positive and supportive. This perception was described much in part to the “party” nature of the downtown area, given its high-rise residence halls and proximity to bars and Lakeland’s fraternity row, referenced by participants as being viewed as more conservative in nature, and as an environment in which discrimination was more commonplace. When asked about why there seemed to be such a significant difference, participants often spoke about the party atmosphere – and by extension, alcohol giving way to an unsupportive climate. Examples of how participants experienced the unsupportive climate when alcohol was at play most often included hearing their peers use derogatory language and finding themselves in situations with their peers asking personal, often inappropriate questions about their identity. Participants commented on how they felt their peers may have felt emboldened to ask questions they may not otherwise ask while sober. Many students referenced their perspectives on the selection of residence halls, stating that the downtown neighborhood was known early on as being louder from the party atmosphere, and not as studious. Stories of these parties had been passed down from older siblings, referenced on campus tours, and shared at orientation sessions. When asked about why she thought there was a difference in climate between areas of campus, Jordan shared her perspective, and noted:

I think cause it’s less party and I find that more LGBTQ kids are not super party. And I feel like in my opinion, the people in like the downtown area just...I feel

like it's very like heterosexually performing. Like go to parties and make out with guys or girls, or whoever is the opposite gender of you.

Alex, a downtown neighborhood participant, echoed this point from the perspective of a student who experienced this firsthand, and spoke to how atmospheres with alcohol elicit an uncertainty for students:

[Redacted] and [redacted] just seemed like big party dorms. So you had a lot more people, like the stereotypical frat boys would kind of live in there. And just in general that's a little scary cause you know, they're kind of the reputation of that. It's just like known for being like homophobic, transphobic, all that stuff. So it was just like, it's always a little nerve wracking just in general meeting new people cause you don't know where they stand on that situation.

Ben elaborated on this when he explained how he tended to be more discerning on whether or not he would be out in different scenarios, depending on context; and how the more people there are in a situation, the higher the likelihood that there will be at least one person who is not accepting:

If I go hang out in someone's dorm and that's kinda like a party situation, I try not to talk about it for whatever reason. Like if there's a large group of people, I feel like I try not to talk about it just cause there's an increased thing about that.

Further, many spoke about how the party culture gives way to a more social atmosphere in general, where deep relationships are not valued quite as much as they are in the lakeside neighborhood of campus. Some participants spoke explicitly about their perceptions of how students who select the lakeside neighborhood tend to be more accepting overall, as they are not prone to the peer pressures that come along with alcohol

and partying. From a physical standpoint, the downtown neighborhood has easy access to fraternity row, as well as other upper-class houses off-campus, while the lakeside neighborhood does not, so students often socialize within the residence halls. Allison, a participant who lives in the downtown area of campus and dates a student who lives on the lakeside are of campus shared:

In [redacted] I feel like the people can be nice, but I feel like there's sort of like a superficialness [*sic*] sometimes. They're just there to party and they'll be friends for a couple months and then just whatever. But I feel like in lakeside it's more genuine and I think that genuine aspect is something that really helps, um, with the acceptance of different kinds of people.

Trans\* students also cited differences in facilities among residence halls on both sides of campus. While both sides of campus's residential facilities include both old and new buildings within their portfolio, the lakeside neighborhood of campus offers more to students in the way of gender inclusive bathroom facilities. This, in fact, was a significant reason the gender and sexuality LLC was placed in a building in the lakeside neighborhood of campus when it opened in the fall of 2013. Within the community, each pair of roommates have their own bathroom in their room, and gender inclusive bathrooms are available to visitors on each floor. Mary spoke of not their own experiences, but that of another student they met during the first few weeks of the semester who was assigned to a residence hall in the downtown neighborhood of campus which has only binary bathroom and shower facilities:

They were saying that it was really, really difficult. Um, especially, you know, the bathrooms are gendered, um, and you know, open...well, it's showers, you know,

it's not a private bathroom. Um, which for someone with this dysphoria and someone who's, you know, non-binary, right. It's a nightmare. I couldn't even imagine.

### ***Living Learning Communities as Sites of Increased Acceptance and Support***

Several LLCs were referenced during the interviews, most notably the gender and sexuality LLC, which opened in the fall of 2013. Each year, approximately 40 students live in the community and take part in programming designed to explore the concepts of gender and sexuality. Students in the community do not have to identify as LGBTQ+, but it often is the case that the majority of the community identifies as such. The gender and sexuality LLC is more than simply theme housing. This LLC, like all LLCs at Lakeland, is significantly resourced, with formal connections to the gender and women's studies department on campus, including faculty replacement funding for a faculty director to the community each year. First year students in the community are also highly encouraged to take part in an academic seminar (taught by the faculty director) that focuses on the constructs of gender and sexuality as a supplement to the everyday experiences of life on the floor for participating students.

In addition to the faculty director, other embedded staff dedicated to the community include a student coordinator and a part-time staff member who work with the faculty director, resident assistant, and the hall coordinator to oversee programs within and beyond the space to support students. The gender and sexuality LLC was referenced often by all participants of all identities as an indicator of inclusion and welcome for students upon applying to Lakeland University, and through the discernment process of accepting admission. For participants who chose not to live in the gender and

sexuality LLC, the existence of the LLC indicated a vague sense that they were signing up to go to school in a supportive environment in general. Participants would reference hearing about the community during campus and housing tours, and reading about the community in promotional materials through the institution as they were selecting where to live in campus, and reading this as a signal of larger support for their identity, regardless of where they chose to live.

Participants who lived in other LLCs on campus, such as the creative arts LLC, sustainability LLC, women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math [STEM] LLC, or multicultural LLC spoke often about how affirming these sites were, with the participants perspectives typically being that students who select into these communities generally tend to being more progressive. Jay shared this sentiment by sharing: “People who are into sustainability are also kind of more politically liberal”.

Sydney offered additional thoughts in the context of sharing what she might recommend to incoming LGBTQ+ students:

I think learning communities are great. Some of them, like the [multicultural LLC] and the [performing arts LLC] because you’re more likely to get somebody who’s at least like if even if they’re not LGBTQ plus, they are at least like a person of color and they understand what it means to be ostracized. And I think that’s like finding common ground.

For others, most notably trans\* participants, living in the LLC was the only way in which they could see themselves being comfortable in the residence halls at Lakeland University. Several participants noted a perception that primarily cis queer people live in other residence halls on campus, such as the creative arts LLC, sustainability LLC,

Women in STEM LLC, or multicultural LLC, while trans\* students live in the gender and sexuality LLC. Philip, a resident of the gender and sexuality LLC, shared their perspective on this:

The thing about [redacted] and [redacted] is the [creative arts LLC] and the [multicultural LLC] over there, which are both kind of hubs of like queer folks that aren't in [gender and sexuality LLC]. Those tend to be like cis queer people. I think there are some trans people that live in at least one last year – I knew a trans person who lived in [redacted], but I think they moved to the [lakeside neighborhood] for this year interestingly enough. Um, but yeah, cause there's like no gender neutral bathrooms in [redacted] or [redacted] and, but people that are cis, they can find the community like the [creative arts LLC] cause it's really like artsy and there's lots of queer people living there and like have a good time. I kind of like thought about living there, but...I need to have a gender neutral bathroom.

The distinctive areas of campus and LLCs as sites of increased acceptance and support emerged as a second major theme through interviews and data analysis. Participants spoke extensively about the reputations among both residential neighborhoods on campus, as well as the perceptions of how LLCs were thought to be more accepting of LGBTQ+ identities based on their close-knit and academically-driven focuses.

### **Indicators of Inclusion**

Participants consistently identified several indicators to positive perceptions of climate within the residence halls. These indicators included (a) The existence of gender-

inclusive bathroom facilities, (b) Passive artifacts and resources, (c) Use of pronouns, (d) Inclusive programming, and (e) Staff representation. The discussion below elaborates on each of these indicators.

### ***Gender Inclusive Bathroom Facilities***

From a facilities standpoint, bathrooms were identified by participants as a significant point of reference for how inclusive they perceived residence halls. Regardless of a participant's identity, bathrooms were seen as an indicator of how inclusive a space was perceived. Participants who live in a community where gender inclusive bathrooms exist identified this readily as one of the factors for their selection of space on campus. The existence or absence of gender inclusive bathrooms was mentioned most often by trans\* students, but only marginally more so than by their cisgender LGBTQ+ peers. When cisgender LGBTQ+ participants referenced bathroom facilities, it was done so out of allyship to their trans\* peers. Similar to the use of pronouns, gender inclusive bathroom facilities were described as sitting atop the peak of inclusiveness.

John, a cisgender bisexual male, spoke to the inconvenience he has observed for anyone wanting to utilize the gender inclusive bathrooms in his community: "If somebody didn't feel comfortable with that in [redacted], you'd have to go across like use your key and get into the other building which would certainly be an inconvenience." Ben, a cisgender gay man, noted that gender neutral bathrooms exist and shared his concern regarding a lack of shower facilities: "Sometimes I do think about the lack of proper shower access for transgender people. I know that they have inclusive restrooms, but they don't have any showers in them for people to use."

For trans\* students, the issue of gender inclusive bathroom facilities was tied to everyday life. Trans\* students living within the gender and sexuality LLC often referenced how significant the location and bathroom set-up was to their selection. A private bathroom and shower are provided in each of the rooms in the community. Trans\* students outside of the gender and sexuality LLC often spoke about needing to make decisions about what bathrooms to use based on outness, layout of facilities, and their own comfort and safety. Philip, a non-binary participant, lived in the gender and sexuality LLC and worked within the residence hall's dining facility; they detailed how they needed to make a concession during work in lieu of using a gender inclusive facility:

When I worked in the dining halls, my first year on campus I tried to just pass as a cis man, which worked relatively well, just because I didn't want to have to explain to people and like, there wasn't really a good gender neutral restroom and the facilities, there was one you'd have to go outside of the work area to access it. So I just lived as a man for my work. And it would be funny if my queer friends were coming to visit me at work and I would go into my queer mode of talking to them and stuff and then have to kind of not do that when there are other coworkers there.

### ***Passive Artifacts and Resources***

Many artifact indicators referenced by participants were passive in nature and indicated a positive perception of climate. These often included items such as pride flags and flyers for events within the residence halls and around campus.

Pride flags were often identified by participants as being signals that they were in a welcoming environment. Participants shared stories of how they have both experienced

seeing pride flags, and how they have used pride flags to signal their own identity in a low-risk capacity. Most often, when pride flags were referenced, participants saw these as indicators of a safe and affirming space. Ben shared:

I was a little bit worried and I was kind of looking for signs of how accepted I would be here, and things like that. And so my [Resident Advisor] has a... not quite like a pride flag, but an acceptance flag. Like everyone's welcomed here on their front door.

On the other side, there were indicators that signaled to students a potentially unwelcome environment. In Evlea's words: "I feel like a Trump sign is the opposite. It's like I should be more cautious with this person."

Participants also spoke extensively about seeing advertisements for events, services, or resources across campus on the bulletin boards within their residence halls, as well as through emails from staff members. Most often, participants described their awareness of these as vague familiarities. Some participants however, logged these as everyday reminders of the support available to them on campus. Elena shared:

I feel like I never go a day or maybe a week without seeing at least one advertisement or something going on within the LGBTQ community. So it's really nice to feel like it does exist. It's there if I did need to talk to somebody or like wanting to be a part of that. So it's like I know that no matter what there's always going to be that community. It's really affirming to know that I'm not alone.

Whether participants tracked these more overtly or not, participants spoke to how these passive items such as fliers and flags informed their perception of climate in the

residence hall as positive. Further, these informed climate for LGBTQ+ students for the broader campus through the promotion of events happening at Lakeland's gender and sexuality center, or other applicable events and resources on campus.

### *Use of Pronouns*

The use of pronouns in spaces were another indicator to participants that they were in a welcoming environment. For some students, using pronouns within introductions at events, seeing these in email signatures, and more signaled that a space was at the peak of inclusion. Trans\* students, in particular, cited the feeling of inclusion when pronouns were used at events. It was also shared that participants viewed upper-class students and staff members as role models for using pronouns in programming at the summer orientation program and at programs in the beginning of the year. Participants clarified that pronouns are not used in common, everyday introductions, but generally more at opening events such as floor meetings, club meetings, and trainings. Mary, a queer student in the gender and sexuality LLC, noted:

What I really noticed and what I really appreciated was that all of the speakers...because there's so many talks during the first week that I had to go to all the speakers, list their name and then their pronouns, which was like, "oh, that's really neat."

Students living in the gender and sexuality LLC spoke to how they more often used pronouns in everyday introductions at the beginning of the semester outside of actual programs. Further, they discussed how, given the nature of the community, it has likely been more commonplace for students' pronouns to evolve as they have learned more about themselves over time.

While participants appreciated the role modeling of upper-class students and staff members using their pronouns at events, this practice unfortunately gave way to the weaponization of pronouns as a joke. Renae shared:

I think that the use of pronouns people have kind of taken as a joke. I remember at [summer orientation], all of these staff were very careful. Every single time they introduced themselves, they introduced themselves with pronouns, which I liked. I was like.. “that’s kind of cool, like great.” But the students kind of just take it as a joke. They’re like “yeah...my pronoun is a water bottle.”

### ***Inclusive Programming***

Participants described two programs which all first-year students were required to attend. The first program was a series of different types of consent programs set up by partner offices on campus. The variety of different types of consent programs ranged from those focused on listening and supporting those who have been assaulted, LGBTQ+ students, and so on. Students were allowed to self-select into the type of program they felt would be most beneficial to them. These programs took place in spaces throughout campus to accommodate group sizes, but the LGBTQ+-focused program occurred at Lakeland’s gender and sexuality center. Not all participants attended the LGBTQ+-focused program. Those who did not were noticeably less impressed with their experience, stating that while other sessions were constructed to be inclusive of LGBTQ+ people, this happened only in minimal ways. Jordan, a participant who attended a general consent program described the discomfort of being in a space with predominantly heterosexual students, and not feeling comfortable to move to the other side of the room, thus outing herself during an activity. Many participants also shared that had their

schedule allowed for them to attend the LGBTQ+-focused program, they would have done so. Several participants even spoke to how more than one LGBTQ+-focused program should be offered to accommodate more LGBTQ+ first-year students.

Participants who participated in this session were complimentary of not only having the option, but how they felt affirmed and centered in the construction of this program. Leo spoke to this when sharing that they appreciated how the LGBTQ+-focused program recognized different dynamics in the LGBTQ+ community:

I think there are a lot of issues specifically in the LGBTQ community that just wouldn't have been talked about in a normal [consent program]. 'Cause [*sic*] there are different procedures for sexual safety and there are different dynamics with the respecting of pronouns and stuff. And that was really good to talk about just with that group.

For a few students, the nuances of their identity made these programs particularly awkward or difficult. Zoo, a trans\* and asexual-identified student, shared his feelings of discomfort with being mandated to attend a session:

I attended with two other people from [gender and sexuality LLC] that made me feel a lot better. I attended like, literally the only one I could go to, which was unfortunately it was [consent program specifically focused on sex], unfortunately, because I'm asexual, so a little awkward.

The second program described was one focused on general inclusion, held within various buildings on campus. The focus of this program was to engage all on-campus residents at Lakeland in issues of diversity and inclusion. Participants had largely positive feedback on these programs, and shared that the programs being mandated signaled to

them how seriously Lakeland takes the inclusion of everyone, regardless of identity, in the broader community. This was often expounded on by residents as an indicator of how open and affirming the broader community was. Jordan shared an instance during an activity where another student shared how they perceived the description of a couple as being comprised of two women holding hands: “Everyone was cool. And then we moved on. So it’s just like everyone’s really calm about it. There’s no direct hate. At least not what I’ve experienced.”

In addition to the consent and inclusivity programs listed above, participants spoke most often of various programs held within the residence halls, such as bonfires hosted by the Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) and a sex-positive and LGBTQ+-inclusive student organization being brought into the residence halls to teach safe sex practices. Additionally, while participants recognized that most LGBTQ+-specific programs were not organized by or located within the residence halls, they spoke the value of existing solid partnerships with various offices on campus, such as the gender and sexuality center.

### ***Staff Representation***

Staff representation emerged as a common reference point for indicators of acceptance and a positive climate. Participants primarily shared stories of how staff members were seen as the facilitators of positive perceptions through sharing of resources and programming. Raleigh, a resident in the gender and sexuality LLC, shared a similar sentiment to his peers when discussing his resident assistant from the previous year: “Last year’s [resident assistant], he was amazing. He was so good at making sure we always had the resources that we needed and making sure we knew exactly what we

needed to do in any type of situation.” Additionally, it was often noted that staff representation was affirming to participants’ identities, and provided confidence that if needed, they would be supported. Most commonly noted among answers across several interview questions was the sense that staff were invested in ensuring that all students, regardless of identity, had a positive experience and felt included. Most often, this was conveyed through participants’ general sense of confidence in support they would receive from staff members based on espoused values of inclusivity within the halls. Other times, support looked more direct. Ben shared how, after coming out to his [resident assistant] earlier in the year, she “asked how it’s going and if there are any issues related to that,” in an effort to be sure that he was having a positive experience. Student staff-resident advisors were most often referenced, given their proximal relationship to the participants.

Several participants, notably participants of color and trans\* students, also referenced how their RA held similar identities and how impactful that representation was to them. For Glucose, a gay male student of color, his RA’s own identity held an even deeper impact:

So fortunately my [resident advisor] is actually gay too, and also a person of color. So it’s kind of, we relate. I feel like we have similar experiences. Also my roommate’s a person of color as well. So I feel that, as just being in the minority groups we kind of understand each other.

Sydney echoed this when speaking about how her resident assistant came out to the floor through a bulletin board and how impactful it was that she shared common identities with them:

I think that he just did a very good job of fostering community in that way.

Without even... I don't even think that was intentional, but you know, somebody seeing that okay, my [resident assistant] is gay, I don't have to hide who I am because they set the norm for the floor and he's just very firm in the whole no disrespect thing.

Leo, a non-binary participant, detailed learning their RA's pronouns: "My [resident assistant], their name's [redacted], and they use they/them pronouns too. And that was very inviting as well, because you know, I haven't really met a lot of non-binary people."

Glucose, Sydney, and Leo's stories illustrate the power of what it means when LGBTQ+ students – especially those who are students of color, trans\*, or hold other identities that are further marginalized within the broader LGBTQ+ community – feel represented. Representation matters from a variety of different angles.

Also referenced in more vague ways were professional staff, often in relation to confidence in knowing that if something happened and they reported an incident, it would be taken seriously, and that administrators did not want students to experience any bias. This was often shared by way of speaking about staff members' use of pronouns in email signatures, meeting them at events, hearing about them through resident advisors, and more. Staff representation as an indicator of positive perceptions of climate remains critical for students, some more than others. It is through others in which we see ourselves, and participants spoke to this throughout their interviews.

## Conclusion

This study sought to gain insight into the perceptions of overall climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students, the experiences that inform these perceptions, and what policies, programs, and practices serve to inform an overall positive climate. As provided in this chapter, I have identified the following major themes through collection and analysis of interviews: (a) Positive overall perception of climate, (b) Peers as primary influence on perceptions, (c) Locations informing assumptions and experiences, and (d) Indicators of inclusion.

The power of peer influence on perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students was the first major theme that emerged from this study. LGBTQ+ student's experiences were shaped through their peers, largely through everyday interactions. For many participants, their arrival to Lakeland University was the first time in which they were exposed to peers with similar identities, providing an affirming experiences. For some participants, particularly those who are students of color, or trans\* students, these experiences were more complex, depending upon what community they lived in specifically. Peer influence also often manifested through indirect experiences, such as the level of acceptance from their roommate(s), the language overheard in common spaces or their rooms, and through bias and microaggressions.

Locations were also found to be critical components of LGBTQ+ students' experiences. Participants often referenced the dynamic between the two distinct residential neighborhoods on campus – lakeside and downtown. The downtown neighborhood, known for its culture around alcohol and party atmosphere, was seen less positively given its reputation. Further, participant feedback on experiences within living

learning communities suggests that these are also sites participants found to be more accepting, based upon the shared values and interests of the student participants within these communities.

Finally, indicators of inclusion on campus included the existence of gender inclusive bathroom facilities, passive artifacts and resources, use of pronouns, inclusive programming, and staff representation. For each of these, the existence and the absence provided context for LGBTQ+ students on what kind of environment they were in. For trans\* students, access to gender inclusive bathroom and shower facilities was pivotal to informing their experience. For their cisgender peers, these facilities were not as vital, but served as important prompts for the level of inclusion they perceived within the residence halls. For all students, the existence or absence of other components such as passive artifacts and resources (e.g. pride flags, emails, or advertisements publicizing LGBTQ+ resources or events), the use of pronouns during meetings or events, inclusive programming, and staff representation were also inventoried and noted to inform their experience.

The major themes described in this chapter will be further explored and interrogated alongside the research questions in this study in chapter five. Doing so will provide a foundation for a discussion of recommendations for future directions in practice and research.

## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The objective of this final chapter is to situate the findings of this study with respect to research questions, and discuss future directions in practice and research. I will first provide a brief refresher of the study structure and methodology. From here, I will provide an in-depth analysis of the findings in this study, aligned with each of the research questions posed. This will be followed by a discussion surrounding the limitations of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. To close, I will offer final thoughts on this study.

A purposeful sample (Creswell, 2007), was solicited through collaboration with key departments at Lakeland University, including residence life, the gender and sexuality studies department, multicultural student center, and the gender and sexuality center. Using this method increased awareness and assured that communication about the study reached the appropriate populations on campus, and provided a range of representation among participants, including not just sexual orientation and gender identity, but also race, ability status, and more.

I used both phenomenology, and grounded theory (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007) to guide the structure of this study. It was important to me to convey participants' lived experiences through this framework, to allow themes to naturally emerge within the data, and to honor the depth and meaning-making of participant's lived experiences. To analyze the data collected through interviews, I used a queer theoretical lens. Utilizing queer theory allowed this study to view the educational experiences of LGBTQ+ students from a perspective of change-oriented education grounded in difference. Because many LGBTQ+ students experience oppression in multiple ways in society, and more

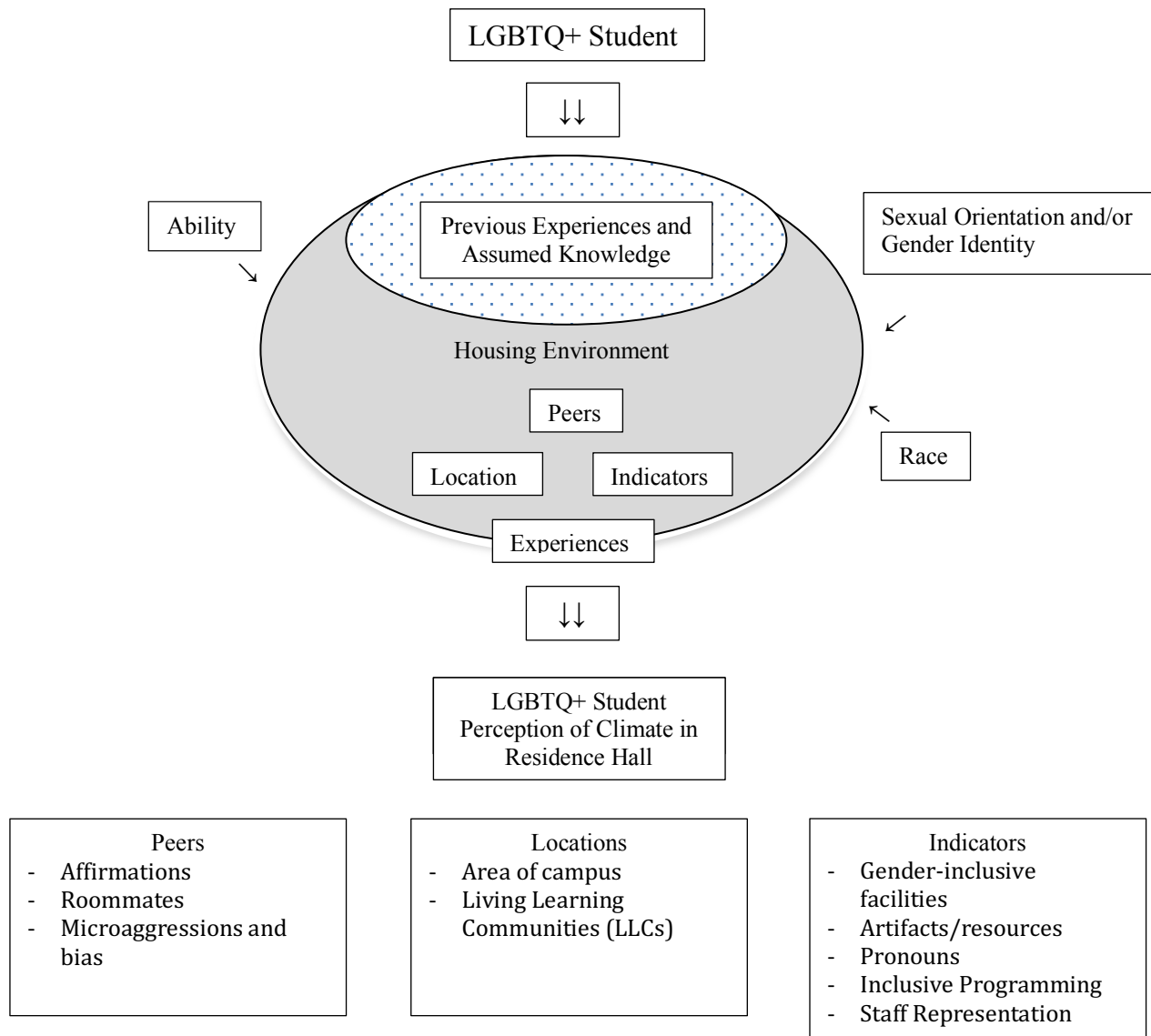
specifically, within higher education, a queered perspective was needed in order to focus on forward-thinking solutions to how educators can improve conditions for LGBTQ+ students.

### **Major Themes and New Knowledge**

From the collection and analysis of this study, several major themes emerged. The first major theme was an overall positive perception of residence hall climate. Second, it was found that the most significant influence on a student's perception of climate was through their experiences with their peers, by way of peer affirmation, as well as incidents of bias and microaggressions. Third, locations such as type of residential neighborhood impacted perceptions – more specifically, culture around alcohol and parties, and the impact of living learning communities. Finally, participants identified several indicators of inclusion that contributed to their perceptions of climate. These included inclusive facilities such as gender inclusive bathrooms, passive artifacts and resources, the use of pronouns, inclusive programming, and staff representation. These themes were discussed in-depth in chapter 4, and are revisited below in relation to how they address each of the research questions posed in this study.

Before moving forward, Figure 1, listed below, provides a visual representation refresher of data collected as the major themes, as well as sub-themes identified in this study.

Figure 1. “Experiences Informing LGBTQ+ Students’ Perceptions of Climate in Residence Halls”



This study also identifies new and still-developing knowledge worth exploring in future research: (a) How the prevalence of alcohol and other drugs within a residential community impacts perceptions of climate; (b) How facilities such as gender-inclusive bathrooms signal a positive climate to cisgender LGBTQ+ students at-large, in addition to providing trans\* students with comfortable, safe facilities; (c) How general inclusion

programs within residence halls, as well as consent-based programs being tailored to LGBTQ+ students, have an overall positive impact on perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students; and (d) How the mere existence of a gender and sexuality-focused LLC impacts perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students in general, and for trans\* students in particular, by informing institutional selection.

### **Addressing Research Questions**

The questions guiding this study were: (a) How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate? (b) What experiences have contributed to their perceptions? and (c) What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls? Each section below will provide a deep-dive in relation to the findings of the study and how they address the three guiding research questions.

#### **How do LGBTQ+ students perceive residence hall climate?**

Participants reported overall positive perceptions of residence hall climate at Lakeland University. Throughout the interviews, participants shared how they held high expectations of inclusiveness and openness at Lakeland University and the surrounding community based on the progressive reputations of both. While academics were the main driver in attracting students to Lakeland University, Lakeland's progressive reputation also served to attract students when they were in the discernment process of which institution of higher education they would choose, among other similar institutions with similarly strong academic reputations. While LGBTQ+ students did not articulate extensive research past the vague notion of a progressive culture on campus, trans\* students consistently spoke to conducting research on campus climate specifically before

arriving on campus, aligned with Linley and Nguyen's findings in 2015, where they found that LGBTQ+ students pay attention to campus climate before enrolling in college.

In the Fall of 2019, several highly public bias incidents were reported on campus outside of the residence halls at Lakeland University. Participants spoke often of how the existence of these incidents informed their perceptions of climate. In these instances, participants, notably participants of color and participants with multiple and/or intersectional identities, would view these public bias incidents broadly as related to climate on campus for underrepresented students. At the same time, the institutional response and follow-up to these incidents was also tracked and weighed in their assessment. Among participants in this study, the perceptions of how Lakeland's administration handled these cases was positive overall, based on their perceptions of communication, public acknowledgement of the incidents, and follow-up. Participants' views on how these incidents were handled effectively filtered down and translated to a positive perception of climate in the residence halls in general, and specifically pertaining to their LGBTQ+ identities.

Somewhat surprisingly, policies were generally not tracked by participants as having an impact on how climate was perceived. Participants who did reference policies such as non-discrimination policies did so usually in a vague nature, referencing only that they knew of their existence and that should they need to call upon support after a negative experience, they would receive support from the administration. Unsurprisingly, trans\* students were more aware of a new gender-inclusive bathroom policy passed on campus in August of 2019 and viewed this positively. The limited scope in which this policy could be enacted within the residence halls given current facilities, however, left

something to be desired for these trans\* participants in particular, as well as their cisgender LGBTQ+ peers.

While participants largely reported overall positive perceptions of residence hall climate at Lakeland, there were still incidents within the residence halls that negatively impacted their experiences. Participants tended to view these as isolated instances that did not reflect their broader experiences or the culture among their peers at large. These negative isolated instances often included examples such as language used among their peers in the form of microaggressions, or assumptions made regarding predatory stereotypes of LGBTQ+ people. One interesting point often referenced by participants was the size of Lakeland's campus, and the amount of students within the residence halls. While the vulnerability of being in close living quarters was often referenced among participants, the flipside of this was that if a student had a negative experience with one of their peers or within a certain space, there were other spaces to which they could move. The perception among participants was that it was fairly easy to simply avoid the common room where a particular group of students throwing out homophobic or transphobic jokes was likely to be, or to submit a room a re-assignment request.

Positive perceptions of climate were reported as being stronger from those who lived in the lakeside neighborhood of campus, and those who lived in any LLC on campus. Regardless of the shared interested of the LLC, the neighborhood they lived on contributed to a more intimate feeling of community that benefited from programmatic support. The reputation of the downtown neighborhood deterred many LGBTQ+ students from selecting into this neighborhood, informed by their apprehension of how their experiences might change after traditional academic hours ended.

Participants spoke nearly unanimously about feeling safe based on their LGBTQ+ identities. The exceptions to this were referenced by women-identified participants who would chronicle experiences where they had been catcalled, for example, at parties – not necessarily for their LGBTQ+ identity, but their perceived female identity. Additionally, students living in the lakeside area of campus often referenced their perceptions that attending parties in the downtown neighborhood of campus would not be as safe as staying where they lived. For those who had attended parties in the downtown area of campus, they often shared examples of how they perceived alcohol tended to prompt their peers to ask invasive questions or make inappropriate statements they may not otherwise say while sober.

In *Trans\* in College* (Nicolazzo, 2017), Nicolazzo explains the concept of arrivals and departures. Arrivals, in this case, defined as “the ways data share commonalities,” (p. 47). Departures, on the other hand, are defined as how “data diverge from one another” (p. 47). For the purposes of this study, it is worth noting the applicability of these concepts in terms of how trans\* participants perceived climate and what factors figured into this (as opposed to their cisgender peers), as well as how participants of color perceived climate (as opposed to their White peers). While all groups ultimately pointed toward a positive overall climate, trans\* students assessed this differently than their cisgender peers, citing the need for their peers to possess a more complex understanding and capacity to learn about their identities. Furthermore, participants of color were able to pull from more negative experiences within the halls, based on their multiple identities.

**What experiences have contributed to their perceptions?**

One of the most significant positive impacts on living in the residence halls for LGBTQ+ students was the value of meeting peers like themselves. Exposure to peers with common identities proved to be affirming for participants in both how they felt the existence of other LGBTQ+ students impacted them positively, and how they felt they were able to positively impact others. For some of the participants, arriving at Lakeland University was the first time in their lives where they were not the only LGBTQ+ person in the room or among their peers. This was often articulated as the first time in which they felt affirmed in who they are and felt a sense of “normalcy” in their own identity. For participants of color, this affirmation was made more complicated. While they may have gained affirmation through meeting and connecting with peers holding similar sexual orientations and/or gender identity, it was often noted by participants of color how rare it was to be in true community that honored their multiple and/or intersectional identities.

The degree to which participants’ roommates were accepting and supportive was a significant factor in influencing participants’ positive perceptions. Specifically, the roommate relationship was often cited as the most significant source of apprehension about moving into the residence halls among participants. Largely, participants’ roommates were supportive of their identities, and it was through this dynamic that many participants felt empowered and comfortable within their residence hall environment. Participants who did not experience the support and acceptance of their roommate(s) reported a generally less positive perception of climate in their residence hall environment. Regarding the participants who did not find support and acceptance from

their roommates, none experienced direct hostility of any manner. Instead, this was typically articulated as the roommates simply not speaking to each other in general, explained as something that may have happened regardless of identities. For one student whose roommate was a Donald Trump supporter, he processed the dynamic as lost cause of sorts – he simply wasn't interested in engaging with his roommate on any topic for fear of what their differences might expose, choosing instead to keep his identity close to his chest.

One note important to reference in regard to the selection of roommates at Lakeland University: students who sign up for LLCs are allowed to pick both a room and a roommate through a social media matching tool. This process serves as a structural tool that assists in mitigating the chances for LLC students to receive an unsupportive roommate.

Just as positive peer interactions were associated with positive perceptions of climate, bias and microaggressions from peers were the most common negative experiences. Participants spoke to how while these were difficult to witness or experience first-hand, these moments did send a strong signal about an environment, person, or group, though the events were difficult to witness or experience first-hand. These moments mostly referred to hearing derogatory language regarding members of the LGBTQ+ community, such as “that’s so gay,” “no homo,” and jokes about gender expression and shifting cultural norms regarding pronouns such as “I identify as a pineapple”. Expanding out from jokes and comments made specifically about LGBTQ+ people, it was also often referenced how jokes about any group were extrapolated to participants as clues that the environment in which they were in at the moment may not

be one in which they could be their full selves. Outside of everyday language, predatory stereotypes encountered by participants also informed their experiences. These were most often referenced as fears coming into the residence halls; unfortunately, some of these fears came to influence participants' interactions. Examples of this would include roommates making remarks about not changing in front of the participants, or not going to the bathroom at the same time out of discomfort.

Other experiences that contributed to participants' perceptions were the observation of artifacts such as pride flags, inclusive programs announcements, and LGBTQ+ focused resources. These provided visual cues that affirmed participants, and reinforced that they were just as much a part of the community as their cisgender and/or heterosexual peers. Tetreault and colleagues (2013) spoke to the power of how perception of climate broadly is informed by the amount of resources on campus, as well as visibility of support throughout campus.

Particularly for trans\* students, the existence or absence of gender-inclusive bathroom and shower facilities greatly impacted their perceptions of climate. For trans\* students living in the gender and sexuality-focused LLC, having bathrooms within their rooms and gender-inclusive restrooms on the floor were vital. For trans\* students living outside of the gender and sexuality-focused LLC, living without gender-inclusive bathroom and shower facilities was a significant sacrifice they had to make in their daily lives, and created anxiety for them within their own living environments.

Finally, in the gender and sexuality-focused LLC, one of the most inspiring trends to come out of this research study was to learn about how affirmation from their peers manifested as healing after de-humanizing situations, such as their parents coming to visit

and “dead-naming” them (using their birthname), or having to move into the residence halls under their birth name.

**What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls?**

As the data were examined, several policies, programs, and practices were found to contribute to the positive climate within the residence halls for LGBTQ+ students.

These are each described below.

***Policies***

As referenced earlier, policies were generally not tracked by participants as having an impact on how climate was perceived. Participants who did reference policies such as non-discrimination policies did so usually in a vague nature, referencing only that they knew of their existence and that should they need to call upon support after a negative experience, they would receive support from the administration. Participants’ seemingly vague awareness is arguably in part due to the work of generations before. In other words, it is through the historical development of protective policies that many LGBTQ+ specific students do not have to engage explicitly with these policies in their daily lives. Unsurprisingly, trans\* students were more aware of a new gender-inclusive bathroom policy passed on campus in August of 2019, and viewed this positively. The limited scope in which this policy could be enacted within the residence halls given current facilities left something to be desired for these trans\* participants in particular, but also for their cisgender LGBTQ+ peers.

### *Programs*

From a programmatic standpoint, Living Learning Communities (LLCs) were perhaps the most impactful program influencing a positive climate within the residence halls across campus. Most specifically, the gender and sexuality-focused LLC was by far described as the most open and welcoming of all identities, based upon its mission. For participants opting to live in this community, the vast majority referenced how vital they viewed living in the community was to their overall success on campus. Other participants in the creative arts LLC, sustainability LLC, women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math [STEM] LLC, and multicultural LLC also expressed how they felt their experience was made positive by their participation in the communities. While the academic component of the communities was not focused on gender and sexuality, the common interests and values held by other students in these communities created a common fabric from which all were respected.

The mandatory inclusion program within the residence halls, as well as the LGBTQ+-focused consent program, were excellent examples of how large-scale programs contribute to positive perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students. In the case of the inclusion program, participants referenced appreciating the space made to engage with their peers about their own identities. While some participants used this space to officially “come out,” others simply used this program to observe and “dip their toe into the water” of whether or not they felt comfortable coming out at a later time, based on their observations of their peers. As for the LGBTQ+-focused consent program, there was resounding support and appreciation for this program, often followed by a note of needing more sections beyond the one offered in the Fall of 2019. Catalano and Jourian

(2018) speak to the importance of integrating LGBTQ+ identities into such trainings, given how “gender norms, interpersonal engagement, and subcultural norms all influence sexual dynamics” (p.46).

### *Practices*

The existence of gender-inclusive bathroom and shower facilities was perhaps the most significant practice contributing to perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students. Gender-inclusive bathroom and shower facilities were seen as significant indicators of inclusion for participants, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The existence or absence of gender inclusive bathrooms was mentioned most often by trans\* students, but only marginally more so than by their cisgender LGBTQ+ peers. While not all trans\* students focused on gender-inclusive facilities, they were much more impacted by the presence or absence of gender-inclusive facilities on a daily basis. Participants in the gender and sexuality LLC spoke to how these were vital to their experience within the residence halls.

Participants often referenced the power of using pronouns – often observed at events among upper-class students, or modeled in email from professional staff. For trans\* students, particularly those self-identifying as early in transition, the use of pronouns assured a space was created for them to share their identity as they felt comfortable. For cisgender LGBTQ+ students, pronouns signaled they were in an inclusive environment.

Staff representation was another practice identified by participants, particularly those with multiple and/or intersectional identities. Participants were apt to name during interviews how seeing themselves in not only their peers, but also staff within the

residence halls, helped them feel a sense of belonging and possibility. This most often happened through resident assistants, and included LLC staff and professional staff as well.

Similar to how representation among staff signaled to participants that they could be comfortable within the residence halls and provide a sense of belonging, so did passive artifacts, such as pride flags and advertisements for LGBTQ+ services, programs, and resources within the halls. Of special note is how participants viewed these not as originating within the residence halls *per se*, but through partnerships on campus with offices such as the gender and sexuality center.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There were several limitations to this study. Each should be taken into consideration for both future practice and research. The first and perhaps most significant limitation is that with any study such as this, there is an inherent selection bias among the participants. In other words, based on my purposeful sampling strategy, only students who were in a place to feel comfortable sharing their experiences participated. That inherently left out a portion of the population of students, each with their own experiences to share. To expand on this point, it is important to think about all of the reasons in which a student, who would otherwise meet the criteria of the study, would not participate. It may be that there were students who were still in the process of coming to terms with their identity, or felt that because they were not out to their peers, they did not have a significant amount to share with me as the researcher. It is possible that there are students who chose not to participate in this study due to trauma of negative experiences. This could also include students who chose not to live on campus, potentially due to

concerns regarding their level of acceptance, lack of access to resources, and so on. The missing voice from this study should be noted. It is not simply enough to draw the conclusion from this study that my findings represent the experiences and perspectives of all LGBTQ+ students, even at Lakeland University alone.

Second, the composition of participants is skewed toward a majority of White, cisgender participants with limited intersecting and/or multiple identities, mirroring the larger demographic trends at Lakeland University. This lessened my ability to widen my lens regarding the experiences of LGBTQ+ students. Without a full understanding of participants' identities, it is difficult to attribute experiences to which identities were most impacted by these. Intersectionality theory suggests that “gender, sexuality, and ethnicity/race co-exist and are simultaneously mutually constitutive and thus constantly influence how social life is structured and organized” (Styhre & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008, p. 568). While this particular study was not geared toward a deep-dive into the dynamics of intersectionality and how intersectional identity impacts perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students, it remains a consideration for future scholarship and practice that some of this was lost through my treatment of grouping all LGBTQ+ identities into one for the purpose of this study.

Last, it is important to consider the delimitation of the narrow applicability based on the study being conducted at only one institution, rather than soliciting participants from several institutions for wider applicability and analysis. Institutional type, region, cultural norms, and more all stand to impact the climate of a campus for LGBTQ+ students, and by extension, the climate in residence halls. It should not be assumed that

the results of this study could apply, for example, to a mission-based institution in the southern United States.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study elicits several considerations for practice. These considerations should be evaluated for how each serve to increase the overall environment of inclusion and support on campus, although they are not always necessarily applicable to all LGBTQ+ students.

The first implication for practice is to consider and interrogate the complexity of identity. As I discussed in Chapter I, Jourian (2015) notes that scholarship and practice in higher education over the last decade has utilized a model of four components of sexual identity: “sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation” (p. 13). Jourian goes on to add that categorizing these components into fixed categories limits an understanding of individual’s identities. Instead, Jourian argues, viewing these as four “interactive, fluid, and nonbinary continua allows us to discuss gender and sexuality in complex and nuanced ways that provide room for agency and self-determination” (p.15). It is critical to take Jourian’s advice to heart, particularly in the practice of how we support LGBTQ+ students as a whole.

Second, keeping this first implication in mind, it is important to continue to explore how the needs of trans\* students differs from their LGBQ+ peers, and implement practices within residence halls with this in mind. As an example, creating seamless, well-publicized, and easy-to-access procedures for students in the residence halls to safely disclose their identity, change their name and/or gender identity, and more remains

critical. Flexibility in that process for students to transition on their own timeline, which could be midway through the academic year, is also imperative.

Third, this study shines a strong light on how alcohol and party cultures impact the experiences of LGBTQ+ students. Practitioners should consider how this occurs on their own campuses and evaluate what practices and interventions can be employed to reduce this high-risk behavior – not just for the sake of the well-being of all students engaged in this behavior, but also for those who are not, and may be negatively impacted in less obvious ways.

Fourth, integrating inclusive practices with LGBTQ+ students in mind into all parts of the student experience remains critical. It is sometimes precisely in the efforts to be inclusive that we falter as practitioners, faculty, and administrators. Ben, a participant in this study, pointed this out when speaking about condom campaigns in the halls being geared toward preventing pregnancy, with limited emphasis on how condoms can also be used to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Not only does this signal to LGBTQ+ students that they do in fact, exist, but also that their health and well-being matters just as much as that of their peers. Participants remarked often on seeing passive items such as advertisements and resources for LGBTQ+ students within the residence halls, and how they knew those were done with different offices and departments on campus – most notably, in this case, the gender and sexuality center. Residence life departments should continue to or seek to build strong connections with similar gender and sexuality centers on campus to continue to examine how all parts of the student experience in the residence halls are inclusive, whether that be through administrative processes of name and/or gender changes, programming, or roommate matching

processes to help mitigate the fear and apprehension LGBTQ+ students can experience coming onto campus, and more. These are critical partnerships in ensuring a holistic review of how equity and inclusion is enacted within residence halls for LGBTQ+ students.

Fifth, evaluating and updating existing facilities is vital, when possible, particularly to the needs of trans\* students. This should include not just bathrooms but shower facilities as well, so that trans\* students have full access to comfort and safety just as their cisgender peers. Additionally, it is recommended that residence life departments move away from gendered floors, halls, and even rooms, all of which reinforce the gender binary. It is particularly important to consider how these are often not department-level issues, but institutional concerns, sometimes influenced by factors such as system governing bodies, churches connected to institutions, and more.

Sixth, beyond bathroom and shower facilities, a good practice is to examine general spaces within residential facilities – such as lounges, common rooms, study rooms, and so on. One point many participants shared in this study was how, when or if faced with someone less than hospitable to them based on their identity, they knew there were plenty of spaces they could pivot to. In other words, they didn't feel trapped or limited in their environment and unable to physically break away from negative experiences.

Seventh, practitioners should continue efforts toward inclusive programming at all levels. This study highlighted the impact that microaggressions have on LGBTQ+ people, further supporting research referencing the impact of microaggressions on LGBTQ+ people (Nadal et al., 2011), particularly pertaining to their mental health. Winberg and

colleagues (2018) add to this voice through their research on the impacts of hearing language such as “that’s so gay” and “no homo” among sexual minority college students, finding adverse drug and alcohol use among LGBTQ+ students exposed to these phrases. Certainly, students coming to college have formed habits and have been socialized on a myriad of conduct, language included. It’s important for practitioners to continue to look for opportunities through programming to bring to light the impact words have on folks with marginalized identities, particularly through a wellbeing lens. Further, the inclusion and consent programs referenced by participants emphasize how valuable these were to their sense of comfort and belonging, as it is not only cisgender, heterosexual students who experience sexual violence.

Last, the continued creation of gender and sexuality-focused living learning communities is worth exploring for practitioners. These communities create a safe space for students to live and explore their identities through programmatic and academic measures. Participants living in the community spoke at length about how vital living in the gender and sexuality-focused community is, rather than in the general non-LLC communities. In some cases, this community was referred to as a deciding factor for trans\* students choosing to attend Lakeland University. For those not living in the community, this was often referenced as a signal to students how Lakeland valued their identity. It is worth noting that the value in exploring these for practice does not just rest in their existence, but also how these are structured, and how institutions invest in academic connections through seminars and funded faculty replacement lines, as well as embedded staff to focus on programmatic features of a community as a carefully planned collaborative effort to the academic component of these communities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In addition to how this study frames recommendations for future practice, this study also informs future research. Further, just as with practice, researchers should keep in mind how these considerations need to be explored with acknowledgment that not all recommendations apply to all LGBTQ+ students, but still contribute to an increase in positive perceptions of climate.

Similar to the first implication for practice referenced above, it is important for future researchers to consider how the experiences of LGBTQ+ students differ from those of their trans\* peers. The needs and perspectives of trans\* students, who arguably sit farther to the margins of their already marginalized LGBTQ+ peers, must be considered and interrogated, given the complexity of their identities.

A second line of inquiry for researchers to consider is how the perceptions and experiences of LGBTQ+ students impact their academic and developmental success on campus and beyond. For the sake of LGBTQ+ student's success, it is vital to build upon existing studies regarding the impact of microaggressions, bias, and harassment (Nadal et al., 2011), negative use of alcohol and other drugs (Winberg et al., 2018), and academic and social integration (Woodford and Kulick, 2015; Mathies et al., 2019).

Third, more research is needed on the specific impact of gender and sexuality-focused living learning communities. As described previously, participants living in the community spoke at length about how vital living in the gender and sexuality-focused community is, rather than in the general non-LLC communities. In some cases, this community was referred to as a deciding factor for trans\* students deciding to attend Lakeland University. With increasing speculation about upcoming enrollment trends in

the next several years, institutions will need to be nimble enough to address the needs of all students on campus – trans\* students included. Communities such as the gender and sexuality-focused LLC in this study serve as good examples to study in how LGBTQ+ students in general view these as signals of inclusion, and how trans\* students make decisions based on their opportunities to participate.

Fourth, further research is needed on how LGBTQ+ students' perceptions of climate are impacted by institutional characteristics, such as type, location, and more. Lakeland University's progressive reputation not only precedes itself, but also informs students' experiences once they are on campus. Just as the participants in this study perceived differences in climate among different residential neighborhoods based on each neighborhood's distinctive characteristics, it is reasonable to assume that the unique culture and characteristics of different institutions would impact perceptions of climate differently from campus to campus.

Fifth, the impact of alcohol and other drugs within the residence halls and their impact on underrepresented students emerges as a worthwhile research area, based in the distinct differences in participants' perceptions of climate between both neighborhoods of campus at Lakeland University. Participants in this study spoke to how it was not the alcohol itself, but the pervasive party culture, and the effect of the alcohol on their peers and their propensity to microaggress, that led to negative perceptions of climate in the downtown area. It is important to interrogate this further to fully understand the full scope of negative effects these experiences on LGBTQ+ students, both in and out of the classroom.

Finally, future research would benefit from continued research on LGBTQ+ students' resiliency through negative events. Emerging research from Nicolazzo (2017) has re-framed the old narrative of the marginalized student as victim, to one of resiliency. Nicolazzo reframes the narrative in how we examine the experiences of trans\* students through the use of resiliency theory, which "provides an opportunity to view trans\* individuals as capable of navigating the adversity they face without suggesting that they are somehow lacking in skills or abilities, or that they need to capitulate to societal expectations to thrive" (p. 41). This is a significant departure from the standard script of research on trans\* students specifically, but even more broadly LGBTQ+ students and how their experiences place students at a deficit – academically, developmentally, etc. Further, this re-framing is empowering due to the divisive spaces faced by LGBTQ+ students, and most notably trans\* students.

### **Final Thoughts**

This study sought to gain insight into the perceptions of overall climate in residence halls for LGBTQ+ students, the experiences that inform these perceptions, and what policies, programs, and practices serve to inform an overall positive climate. The study found that while participants identified isolated negative experiences, overall perceptions of climate were positive, with several key components contributing to this perception, including the influence of peers on LGBTQ+ students' experiences, locations informing assumptions and experiences, and indicators of inclusion, such as inclusive programming, staff representation, passive resources, and more. The results of this study point to how, while there may be a history of negative perceptions of climate among

LGBTQ+ students in residence halls, there remains hope for progress toward more positive experiences for LGBTQ+ students.

This study also identifies new knowledge to pursue by way of future research: (a) How the prevalence of alcohol and other drugs within a residential community impacts perceptions of climate; (b) How facilities such as gender-inclusive bathrooms signal a positive climate to cisgender LGBTQ+ students at-large, in addition to providing trans\* students with comfortable, safe facilities; (c) How general inclusion programs within residence halls, as well as consent-based programs tailored to LGBTQ+ students, have an overall positive impact on perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students; and (d) How the mere existence of a gender and sexuality-focused LLC impacts perceptions of climate for LGBTQ+ students in general, and for trans\* students in particular, by informing institutional selection.

The study and its results are not without limitations, particularly in how LGBTQ+ students are grouped together as one singular group, and the limited nature of studying students at only one institution and its generalizability to other institutions. It is my hope that what is taken from this study compels student affairs practitioners, faculty, and administrators to use what is learned here to continue to look for ways in which we can make continual progress for LGBTQ+ students and their experiences within the residence halls, through both research and practice.

## References

- Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Astin, A. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(3), 297-308.
- Beemyn, B. G. (2005). Making campuses more inclusive of transgender students. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 3(1), 77-87.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Borg, W. R., Gall, J. P., & Gall, M. D. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction* (8<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Britzman, D. P. (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. *Educational Theory*, 45(2), 151-165.
- Brown, R. D. (2004). Assessing the campus climate for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) students using a multiple perspectives approach. *Journal of College Student Development*, 45(1), 8-26.
- Brown, R. D. & Gortmaker, V. J. (2006). Out of the college closet: Differences in perceptions and experiences among out and closeted lesbian and gay students. *College Student Journal*, 40(3), 606-619.
- Cabrera, A. F., Nora, A., Terenzini, P. T., Pascarella, E., & Hagedorn, L. S. (1999). Campus racial climate and the adjustment of students to college: A comparison between white students and African-American students. *Journal of Higher Education*, 70(2), 134-160.

- Capper, C.A., (1998). Critically oriented and postmodern perspectives: Sorting out the differences and applications for practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 34(3), 354-379.
- Carroll, J. S., Clark, C., Marshall, W. J., & Willoughby, B. J. (2009). The decline of In Loco Parentis and the shift to coed housing on college campuses. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 24(1), 21-30.
- Catalano, C. J. & Jourian, T. J. (2018). LGBTQ Centers: A queering of gender-aware practice. *New Directions for Student Services*, 164, 41-50.
- Conrad, C. F., Haworth, J. G., & Millar, S. B. (2001). A positioned subject approach to inquiry. In C. F. Conrad, J. G. Haworth, L. R. Lattuca (Eds.), *Qualitative research in higher education: Expanding perspectives* (pp. 203-216). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Crenshaw, K. (1988). Race, Reform and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Anti-Discrimination Law. *Harvard Law Review*, 101, 1331-1387.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- John W. Creswell & Dana L. Miller (2000) Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry, *Theory Into Practice*, 39(3), 124-130.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (1989). Lesbian's and gay men's experiences of discrimination and harassment in a university community. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 17(3), 317-321.
- Dilley, P. (1999). Queer theory: Under construction. *Qualitative Studies in Education*. 12(5), 457-472.

- Draughn, T., Elkins, B., & Roy, R. (2002). Allies in the struggle: Eradicating homophobia and heterosexism on campus. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 6(3) 9-20.
- Engstrom, C. M. & Sedlacek, W. (1997). Attitudes of heterosexual students toward their gay male and lesbian peers. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38(6), 565-576.
- Erdmann, A. J. (2009). *Out of the dorm room closet: Residence hall climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students* (Unpublished Master's Capstone). University of Wisconsin-Madison. Madison, Wisconsin.
- Evans, N. J. & Broido, E. M. (2002). The experiences of lesbian and bisexual women in college residence halls: Implications for addressing homophobia and heterosexism. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 6, 29-42.
- Evans, N., Reason, R., & Broido, E. (2001). Lesbian, gay, bisexual students' perceptions of resident assistants: Implications for resident assistant selection and training. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 21(1), 82-91.
- Fanucce, M. L. & Taub, D. J. (2010). The relationship of homonegativity to LGBT students' and non-LGBT students' perceptions of residence hall climate. *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*, 36(2), 24-41.
- Garvey, J. C., Sanders, L. A., & Flint, M. A. (2017). Generational perceptions of campus climate amongst LGBTQ undergraduates. *Journal of College Student Development*, 58(6), 795-817.
- Herbst, S. & Malaney, G.D. (1999). Perceived value of a special interest residential program for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators*, 36(2), 106-119.

- Hughes, M. (1994). Helping students understand and appreciate diversity. In C. C. Schroeder & P. Mable (Eds.), *Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls* (pp. 190-217). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Hurtado, S., Carter, D. F., & Kardia, D. (1998). The climate for diversity: Key issues for institutional self-study. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 98, 53-63.
- Jourian, T. J. (2015). Evolving nature of sexual orientation and gender identity. *New Directions for Student Affairs*, 152, 11-23.
- Kaya, N. (2004). Residence hall climate: Predicting first-year students' adjustments to college. University of South Carolina. National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.
- Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W., & Martin, C. (1948). *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia, PA: W.B. Saunders.
- Kuh, G. D. (1994). Creating campus climates that foster student learning. In C. Schroeder and P. Mable (Eds.), *Realizing the educational potential of residence halls* (pp. 109-132). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, D.C.: AAC&U.
- Kuh, G.D. & Whitt, E.J. (2000). Culture in American colleges and universities. In Brown, C.M. III (Ed.) *Organization and Governance in Higher Education* (pp. 160-169). Boston, MA: American Study for Higher Education.
- Kumashiro, K. K. (2000). Toward a theory of anti-oppressive education. *Review of Educational Research*, 70(1), 25-53.

- Linley, J. L. & Nguyen, D. J. (2015). LGBTQ experiences in curricular contexts. *New Directions for Student Services, 152*, 41-53.
- Matthies, N., Coleman, T., McKie, R. M., Woodford, M .R., Courtice, E. L., Travers, R., & Renn, K. A. (2019) Hearing “that’s so gay” and “no homo” on academic outcomes for LGBTQ+ college students. *Journal of LGBTQ Youth, 16*(3), 255-277.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*.  
Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- McKinney, J. S. (2005). On the margins: A study of the experiences of transgender college students. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 3*(1), 63-75.
- Murphy, R., & Pasque, P. A. (2005). The intersections of living-learning programs and social identity as factors of academic achievement and intellectual engagement. *Journal of College Student Development, 46*(4), 429-441.
- Nadal, K. L. (2008). Preventing racial, ethnic, gender, sexual minority, disability, and religious microaggressions: Recommendations for promoting positive mental health. *Prevention in Counseling Psychology: Theory, Research, Practice and Training, 2*(1), 22–27.
- Nadal, K. L., Issa, M. A., Leon, J., Meterko, V., Wideman, M. & Wong, Y. (2011) Sexual orientation microaggressions: “Death by a thousand cuts” for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 8*, 235-259.
- Nakamura, K. (1998). Transitioning on campus: A case studies approach in working with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender college students. In R. L. Sanlo, (Ed.), *Working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender college students: A*

- handbook for faculty and administrators* (pp. 179-186). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Nicolazzo, Z. (2016). *Trans\* in College: Transgender Students' Strategies for Navigating Campus Life and the Institutional Politics of Inclusion*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Palmer, C. J. (1996) Violence and other forms of victimization in residence halls: Perspectives of resident assistants. *Journal of College Student Development*, 37(1).
- Pascarella, E.T., Terenzini, P.T., & Blimling, G.S. (1994). The impact of residential life on students. In C. C. Schroeder & P. Mable (Eds.), *Realizing the Educational Potential of Residence Halls* (pp. 22-52). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Peterson, M. W. & Spencer, M. G. (2000). Understanding academic culture and climate. In Brown, C.M. III (Ed.) *Organization and governance in higher education* (pp. 170-181). Boston, MA: American Study for Higher Education.
- Pinar, W. F. (2003). Queer theory in education. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45(2/3/4), 357-360.
- Pomerantz, L. E. (2010). Winning the housing lottery: Ganging university housing policies for transgender students. *Journal of Constitutional Law*, 12(4), 1215-1255.
- Pusch, R. S. (2005). Objects of curiosity: Transgender college students' perceptions of the reactions of others. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education*, 3(1), 45-67.

- Rankin, S. (1998). Campus climate for sexual minorities. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(5), 745-774.
- Rankin, S. (2003). Campus climate for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people: A national perspective. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy. New York.
- Rankin, S. (2005). Campus climate for sexual minorities. *New Directions for Student Services*, 111(1), 17-23.
- Rankin, S. (2006). LGBTQA students on campus: Is higher education making the grade? *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education*, 3(2/3), 111-117.
- Rankin, S. (2010). 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBTQ People. Campus Pride.
- Renn, K. A., (2010). LGBT and queer research in higher education: The state and status of the field. *Educational Researcher*, 39(2), 132-141.
- Rhoads, R. A. (1995). The college campus climate for gay students. *Education Digest*, 61(1), 57-60.
- Rhoads, R. A. (1995). Learning from the coming-out experiences of college males. *Journal of College Student Development*, 36, 67-74.
- Rhoads, R. A. (1997). A subcultural study of gay and bisexual college males: Resisting developmental inclinations. *Journal of Higher Education*, 68, 460-482.
- Safe Zone project LGBTQ+ vocabulary glossary of terms* (n.d.) The Safe Zone Project. Retrieved February 23, 2020, from <https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/vocabulary/>
- Sanlo, R. (2004). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students: Risk, resiliency, and retention. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 6(1), 97-110.

- Sanlo, R. L. & Zemsky, B. (2005). Do policies matter? *New Directions for Student Services, 111*, 7-15.
- Sausa, L. A., (2002). Updating college and university campus policies: Meeting the needs of trans students, staff, and faculty. *Journal of Lesbian Studies, 6*(3), 43-55.
- Schneider, W. (2010). Where do we belong? Addressing the needs of transgender students in higher education. *The Vermont Connection, 31*(1), 96-106.
- Schwandt, T. A. (1994). Constructivist, interpretivist approaches to human inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 118-137). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*, 1372–1380.
- Steele, C. (2010). *Whistling Vivaldi: and other clues to how stereotypes affect us*. New York : W.W. Norton & Company.
- Stein, A. & Plummer, K. (1994). “I can’t even think straight.” “Queer” theory and the missing sexual revolution in sociology. *Sociological Theory, 12*(2), 178-187.
- Styhre, A. & Eriksson-Zetterquist, U. (2008). Thinking the multiple in gender and diversity studies: Examining the concept of intersectionality. *Gender in Management: An International Journal, 23*(8), 567-582.
- Terenzini, P.T., Pascarella, E.T., & Blimling, G. (1996). Students’ out-of-class experiences and their influence on learning and cognitive development: A literature review. *Journal of College Student Development, 37*, 149-162.

- Tetreault, P.A., Fette, R., Meidlinger, P. C., & Hope, D. A. (2013). Perceptions of campus climate by sexual minorities. *Journal of homosexuality*, 60(7), 947-964.
- Tompkins, A. (2014). Asterisk. *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1(1/2), 26-27.
- Vaccaro, A. (2006). Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. In L. A. Gohn & G. R. Albin (Eds.) *Understanding college student subpopulations* (pp. 349-386). Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- Vaccaro, A. (2012). Campus microclimates for LGBT faculty, staff, and students: An exploration of the intersections of social identity and campus roles. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 44(4), 429-446.
- Waldo, C. R. (1998). Out on campus: Sexual orientation and academic climate in a university context. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 26(5), 745-774.
- Winberg, C., Coleman, T., Woodford, M. R., McKie, R. M., Travers, R. & Renn, K. A. (2018). Hearing “that’s so gay” and “no homo” on campus and substance use among sexual minority college students. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 66(10), 1472-1494.
- Woodford, M. R. & Kulick, A. (2015). Academic and social integration on campus among sexual minority students: The impacts of psychological and experiential campus climate. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 15, 13-24.

## Appendix A

### Research Participant Information and Consent Form

**Title of the Study:** Out of the Closet: Examining Residence Hall Climate at a Large Public Research Institution for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\* and Questioning Students

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Jerlando F. L. Jackson (phone: 608-262-8866) (email: jjackson@education.wisc.edu)

Student Researcher: Andrew J. Erdmann (phone: 920-242-4824) (email: ajerdmann@wisc.edu)

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a research study about perceived climate in residence halls for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans\* and Queer college students and the experiences that contribute to this perceived climate. Interviews will be conducted at a location of the subject's choice. This may include an office, public location or the subject's home. Audio files will be made of your participation. Only approved personnel will hear the recording.

You have been asked to participate because we are interested in hearing about your experiences as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, or queer college student who currently lives in or previously lived in a residence hall.

The purpose of the research is to research the perceived climate in residence halls and the experiences that influence this perceived climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, and queer students who currently live in or have previously lived in a residence hall.

This study will include lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, and queer-identified students who currently live in or previously lived in the residence halls.

#### **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

If you decide to participate in this research you will be asked to participate in one individual interview, in which you will provide information about your perceptions of campus climate and the experiences that influence this perception as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\* or queer-identified student. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions that will inquire about your experiences in the residence halls regarding safety, comfort, policy, programs, etc.

#### **ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

There is an inherent psychological risk for participants when discussing potential issues of bias and discrimination. There is also a social risk of being outed through participating in this study. These risks could include personal risks such as alienation from family or friends, fiscal risks from losing financial support from their families. Finally, there is a

risk of a data breach/breach of confidentiality.

Researcher will take all necessary precautions to minimize risk. First, the researcher will provide resources specific to each campus for participants to access in the event of any psychological distress. Second, the researcher will provide several options for both public spaces (such as coffee shops) and private space (reserved spaces on campus) as options, but will ultimately allow each participant to dictate where and when they are most comfortable for the interview. Third, all participants will be allowed to create an alias or code to identify their responses. The researcher will ensure that participants will not utilize their own names as an alias/pseudonym, or any name that could identify them. Finally, all recordings will be stored as secure audio files, maintained only by the researcher and principle investigator in UW Box. Participants will be provided the opportunity to request their own interview file at any point in the process.

### **ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

There are no direct benefits to individual participants. This research may provide furthered knowledge of climate in residence halls for LGBTQ-identified students, thus allowing practitioners more knowledge with which to develop support services and programs.

### **HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

While there will probably be publications as a result of this study, your name will not be used.

If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you directly without using your name. If you agree to allow us to quote you in publications, please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

### **WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today, you should contact the Principal Investigator Dr. Jerlando F. L. Jackson at 608-262-8866. You may also call the student researcher, Andrew J. Erdmann at 920-242-4824.

If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study, you may do so without penalty.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Date

---

\_\_\_\_\_ I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

Date:	University code:
Place:	Time of interview:
Length of interview:	Class standing:
Interviewee code:	Pronouns:
Gender Identity:	Sexual Orientation:
Race:	First Generation:

#### **Opening of Interview**

- Thank participant for coming to the interview
- Explain and complete Interview Consent Form
- Begin recording
- Ask student which gender pronouns they prefer
- Explain role and positionality as interviewer and investigator
- Note that participation is voluntary and they can decline to answer any question during the interview and can withdrawal from the study at any time without penalty
- Convey that all interview materials will be kept in a secure location and that confidentiality will be maintained
- Note that at the end of the interview the participant will have an opportunity to ask questions
- Explain who will have access to interview materials and explain how the information will be used
- Collect demographic information
- Remind participant that pseudonym will be used when transcribing their interview

#### **Introduction and Greeting**

The reason we are meeting today is so that I can learn more about your experience as an LGBTQ-identified student on campus and more specifically, within the residence halls. Specifically, I'm interested in your experiences around facilities, programming, your observation of policy, what has made you feel welcome, not welcome, etc. There are no right answers – I'm simply looking to hear about your experiences good, bad, and otherwise.

#### **Opening questions**

- Tell me about yourself
- Why did you choose this university?
- To what degree are you out currently to family, friends, floormates?
- What did you know about this university's LGBTQ policies and practices before you applied?
- To what extent did this university's approach to LGBTQ students influence your university selection, if at all?
- Why did you select the residence hall that you lived in/currently live in?
- To what extent did this residence hall's reputation related to LGBTQ students influence your decision to live there?

#### **RQ1: How do LGBTQ students perceive residence hall climate?**

- If you were to describe your experience within the residence halls as an LGBTQ student to a friend back home, what would you say?
- Can you please provide specific examples?

- Before you moved into the residence halls, what expectations did you have (if any) of how others might treat you based on your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?
- Do you feel like those expectations have been met? Why or why not?
  - *Are you able to tell me about a time where you felt unsafe or uncomfortable within your residence hall based on your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?*
  - *Are you able to tell me about a time where you felt affirmed within your residence hall based on your sexual orientation and/or gender identity?*

**RQ2: What experiences have contributed to their perceptions?**

- What are the positive aspects of residence hall living for LGBTQ students?
- What are the negative aspects of residence hall living for LGBTQ students?
- How included do you feel in your residential community?
- What indicators have contributed to your sense of being included?
- How comfortable do you feel in the hall?
- What indicators have contributed to your comfort level in the hall?
- How safe do you feel?
- Are you out to your roommate?
- What was your relationship like with your roommate? To what extent did that affect your comfort level in the residence hall?
  - *Can you tell me about how you experience your RA? How has your RA contributed to your experiences and the experiences of others on the floor. Can you provide some examples?*
  - *Have you witnessed any acts of harassment towards anyone in the hall (yourself included) based upon their LGBTQ (or assumed LGBTQ) identity? Can you provide some examples?*
  - *What sorts of language have you overheard from your peers in regards to folks with LGBTQ identities?*
  - *Have you been witness to any political discourse that has impacted how comfortable you feel in the residence halls?*
  - *What locations within the residence hall do you feel most comfortable and why?*
  - *What locations within the residence hall do you feel least comfortable and why?*

**RQ3: What policies, programs, and practices contribute to positive climate within the residence halls?**

- To what extent are you aware of resources in the residence halls or on campus for LGBTQ issues?
- Have you seen any advertisements for resources or events that serve to support LGBTQ students? How have these impacted your experience?
- What have you noticed about facilities in the residence halls that have an impact on your perception of climate?
  - *Is the use of pronouns a regular occurrence in the halls? On campus? Why or why not from your perspective?*
  - *Have you attended any LGBTQ-specific programs in the residence halls? On campus? What was that experience like?*

**Closing Questions**

1. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experiences or anything you might find important for my study?
2. What questions do you have?

## Appendix C

### Study Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>Class Year</b>	<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<b>Gender Identity</b>	<b>Race</b>
Adriana	She, her, hers	Sophomore	Bisexual	Female	Latin X/Caucasian
Alex	He, Him, His	First Year	Gay	Male	White
Allison	She, her, hers	First Year	Lesbian	Female	Asian
Ann	She, her, hers	First Year	Bisexual	Cis Female	White
Ben	He, him, his	First Year	Gay	Male	White
Bill	He, him, his	First Year	Queer	Cis Male	White
Elena	She, her, hers	Sophomore	Bisexual	Female	Hispanic
Evlea	She, her, hers	Sophomore	Bisexual	Female	White
Glucose	He, him, his	First Year	Gay	Man	Asian
Greyson	He, him, his	First Year	Bisexual	I don't know/Male	White
Gwen	She, her, hers	Sophomore	Bisexual	Cis Woman	White
Jane	She, her, hers	First Year	Lesbian	Cis Woman	White
Jay	She, her, hers	First Year	Somewhere between Lesbian and Queer	Female?	White
John	He, him, his	Sophomore	Bisexual	Male	Caucasian
Jordan	She, her, hers	First Year	Bisexual	Female	White
Leo	They, them, theirs	First Year	Queer	Non-Binary	White
Mary	They, them, theirs/ She, her, hers	First Year	Queer	Gender Queer	Caucasian
Meg	She, her, hers	First Year	Pansexual/Bisexual	Female	White
Nick	He, him, his	First Year	Gay	Male	White
Noah	He, him, his	First Year	Straight	Transgender Male	Asian and White
Philip	They, them, theirs	Sophomore	Gay/Androsexual	Non-binary	White
Raleigh	He, him, His	Junior (transfer)	Gay	Man	White
Renaë	She, her, hers	Sophomore	Lesbian	Female	White
Robyn	She, her, hers	First Year	Bisexual	Female	Asian
Royalty	He, him, his	Sophomore	Gay	Male	African American
Siobhan	All pronouns	First Year	Queer	Personally, no gender; Politically, Female	White
Sydney	She, her, hers	Sophomore	Pansexual	Femme	Black
Zoo	He, him, his	First Year	Queer	Transgender Man	White

## Appendix D

### Email Advertisement

Subject: LGBTQ – Identified Research Participants Needed

Email:

Hello,

My name is Andrew Erdmann, and I am a doctoral candidate in UW-Madison's Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis. As part of my doctoral dissertation, I am looking for participants in an approximately 60-minute long interview to study perceptions of climate in residence halls for LGBTQ students. I'm hoping you can assist by sharing this with your students on any appropriate listservs you might have. Participants will receive a \$30 Amazon e-gift card for their participation.

Specifically, I'm looking for students who are:

- An undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin- Madison
- In their first four semesters of undergraduate study
- Who currently live in or have lived in University Housing for at least two months within the previous year.
- Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer

I will be on campus from October 17-18 and November 11-15. This interview can take place in the location of the participant's choosing. If interested, I have worked with staff in the Residence Life office to reserve private spaces in which to conduct the interviews. Participation in this study is voluntary.

If interested, please contact Andrew Erdmann at [ajerdmann@wisc.edu](mailto:ajerdmann@wisc.edu).