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The Effect of LGBT Resource Centers on Student Success & Engagement

Kristopher A. Oliveira

St. Cloud State University, Kristopher.Oliveira@hotmail.com

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The Effect of LGBT Resource Centers on Student Success and Engagement

by

Kristopher Andrew Oliveira

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Steven McCullar, Chairperson

Dr. Christine Imbra

Dr. Jodi Kuznia

Dr. Stephen Philion

Abstract

This quantitative study was developed to determine whether involvement in a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Resource Center had a measurable impact on the success, engagement, and retention of LGBTQ students at St. Cloud State University. Success included academic completion and grade point average (GPA); engagement included the number of times and type of participation in the LGBT Resource Center; and retention was measured by the student's self-reported intention of returning to the university. An online survey was sent to all students (undergraduate and graduate) at St. Cloud State University in the spring semester of 2017. Approximately 500 students began the survey, and 124 were deemed eligible participants by virtue of their self-identification as LGBTQ. Students answered questions about the student status, their involvement in the LGBT Resource Center, their level of outness, and their opinion of the campus climate. Regression tests, one-way ANOVA tests, and correlation tests were used to determine the relationship (and strength of relationship) between engagement in the LGBT Resource Center and students' GPA and retention.

The results of this study indicate that there were positive relationships between 'outness' and student involvement. A surprising result of this study was that students who admitted to hiding their gender identity and/or sexual orientation were more likely to have a higher GPA. Overall results of this study indicate there was no significant relationship between involvement in the LGBT Resource Center and LGBTQ students' GPAs and retention. Based on the challenges that the researcher faced when disseminating the survey, it is difficult to determine

the validity of the survey findings, and warrants an opportunity to re-measure this student population and the measurable outcomes of their involvement in an LGBTQ resource center.

Keywords: LGBT, Higher Education, College, University, Students

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Chapter I: Introduction

The buzzwords of higher education—diversity, intersectionality, inclusivity, equality—are floating through the halls of colleges and universities across the nation (Talkington, 2006). With greater visibility for most minority identities (including racial, ethnic, ability status, sexuality, and gender), it seems that these affirmative terms are significant in supporting the changing student demographic of higher education. According to Torres (2006), “diversity in higher education is an imperative, and as academia has slowly awakened from its privileged and exclusive past, we’re beginning to see a few academic institutions that are coming to look like the rest of America” (p. 67). Although, as Clauss-Ehlers and Parham (2014) noted, the changing trends in the student population have not meant social harmony on campus. This has been the experience for many students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ).

One distinct feature of the LGBTQ population is the discrimination they experience that is often the result of a perceived and assumed gender identity or sexual orientation (Johnson, Oxendine, Taub, & Robertson, 2013). Discrimination that targets the LGBTQ community has, however, become more covert. As explained by Aberson, Swan, and Emerson (1999), bias against LGBTQ people has become “less overt as societal mores increasingly condemn negative attitudes toward them” (p. 325). Research produced by The Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task force shows that one-third of undergraduate students experience harassment on campus, and when it occurs it is usually (89%) in the form of derogatory remarks (Rankin, 2003). In response to this trend, many colleges and universities have developed LGBTQ resource centers, programming, and services designed to improve the campus climate for LGBTQ

students, as well as to actively engage all students on issues of diversity, especially as they pertain to the status of LGBTQ people.

LGBTQ students, as a demographic, constitute a unique student population because they exist as an invisible minority. As Toynton (2006) noted, LGBTQ identities are invisible because they cannot be identified by their look or their faces. A person's sexual orientation and gender identity cannot be determined by their physical appearance; thus, their minority status is invisible (Clarke, Peel, Riggs, & Ellis, 2010). As a result of this invisibility, much of the literature contends that conducting research is made difficult because participants are hidden or more difficult to locate. For this reason, Sanlo and Espinoza (2012) argued, "the LGBTQ college population is invisible . . . in much of the literature" (p. 477) According to Johnson, Oxendine, Taub, and Robertson (2013), "the lack of statistics on LGBT students is further increased given that institutions of higher education typically do not collect demographic information such as sexual orientation or gender identity or expression from their students" (p. 59). Research from Campus Pride, however, reveals the startling results about discrimination and harassment experienced by LGBTQ students on college campuses (Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). Despite negative attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities, visibility for LGBTQ people has increased (directly resulting from an increase of rights and social acceptability) over the last few decades (Bond, 2015; Burgess & Baunach, 2014). Consequently, colleges and universities are charged with providing adequate resources for LGBTQ identified students (Fine, 2012).

A great deal of literature on student engagement and student engagement theory has been expounded since the early 1980s. Under different guises, student engagement has been called

“quality of effort, involvement, and engagement” by the experts and founders of student engagement theory (Pike, Smart, Kuh, & Hayek, 2006, p. 850). In his article *Involvement: The Cornerstone of Excellence*, Astin (1985) introduced student involvement as “the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience” both inside and outside of the classroom (p. 36).

It is presumed that student engagement (and student success) includes retaining individual students from year to year. Tinto (1990), whose work on student retention has been a leading principle in the field of higher education, determined that retention programming is successful when it works to incorporate all students into the social and academic life of the institution. Kuh (2003), who is considered to be an expert on student engagement and the founder of the *National Survey of Student Engagement* (NSSE), determined that first-year college students are less engaged than they had expected to be, especially in the amount of reading and writing they complete, as well exposure to cultural activities. Despite the great body of research on student engagement and student involvement, very little research has been conducted to highlight the level of engagement of LGBTQ resource centers, programming, and services with LGBTQ students.

Additionally, no apparent research exists that links LGBTQ campus services to any tangible outcomes for LGBTQ students. Such outcomes might include intent to remain at an institution, grade point average (GPA), ability to persist through challenges, a positive outlook of the student’s future, and a sense of belonging at the college or university. Several of these examples will be identified as components of success and/or engagement. For this reason, and in consideration of the existing literature, it is important to determine whether the engagement,

success, and retention rates of LGBTQ students are affected by LGBTQ resource centers, programming, and services.

St. Cloud State University and the LGBTQ Student Population

St. Cloud State University (SCSU) is a regional comprehensive university in central Minnesota, and is one of seven four-year universities in the Minnesota State system. Founded in 1869 as the Third State Normal School, St. Cloud State University is the second largest public university in Minnesota (second to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Minnesota). In the fall of 2015, SCSU enrolled 15,461 students, including 1,832 graduate students (St. Cloud State University, 2016a). The mission of SCSU is to prepare, “students for life, work and citizenship in the twenty-first century” (St. Cloud State University, 2016b).

The LGBT Resource Center at St. Cloud State University attempts to embody the institutional mission by “providing an inclusive and educational environment for all SCSU students, staff, faculty, alumni, allies, and the community at large” (LGBT Resource Center at SCSU, 2016). The LGBT Resource Center was founded in the late 1990s, and has been housed in the basement of the campus Women’s Center, behind a campus theatre in the student center, and finally in a centralized location in the student center.

In the spring of 2012, the LGBT Resource Center at SCSU distributed a campus wide survey to assess its strengths and weaknesses, as well as to request suggestions for the improvement of the services and programming offered by the resource center. A report from this survey revealed several themes including: homophobic attitudes on campus; a tense campus climate; and a desire for queer-affirming programming. Although the hard-data from this survey has been lost in succession, a secondary source (a former director of the LGBT Resource Center

who was responsible for distributing this study) indicated that approximately 1,200 students identified as LGBTQ, or indicated that they have sexual behaviors that are in-line with LGBTQ identified people. With this number in mind, the data reveals that between eight and twelve percent of students at SCSU identified as LGBTQ.

Statement of the Problem

In a decade when the nation is experiencing unprecedented student-loan debt, and institutions of higher education are similarly combatting major financial crises, colleges and universities are attempting to keep the cost of attendance low to keep enrollment numbers up (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011; Stuart, 2015). In response to these multi-faceted financial crises, colleges and universities are cutting programming which includes student resources that are deemed unnecessary (e.g., those with the least measurable impact). But how will universities quantify the measurable impact and will this effect which resources are subject to budget cuts? LGBTQ resource centers are still a novelty on college campuses. Per the Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Professionals (2016), of approximately 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States, there are approximately 250 LGBTQ resource centers. Identifying the tangible (academic and social) outcomes of student involvement in LGBTQ resource centers, programming and services can help to substantiate the role (and funding) of these resources on college campuses. Similarly, for institutions that are looking to develop an LGBTQ resource center, data that highlights the efficacy of this service could substantiate its' benefits as a necessity.

Further, research of this type, grounded in the data, opinions, and experiences of students, can also help to reshape the existing ways that LGBTQ resource centers deliver programming

and services. Student participation in discussions and research about dimensions of university life is imperative to the success of the institution, program, or service, and consequently the student (Carey, 2013). As LGBTQ resource center professionals focus on providing services for an exceedingly more visible community, identifying positive outcomes, and fostering the practices that elicited these outcomes, will help them to contribute to the success of their students.

Description and Scope of the Research

In order to determine the tangible outcomes for LGBTQ students who participate in, or engage with LGBTQ resource centers, programming, and services, this study surveyed students at SCSU. The goals of the study were to describe the population; determine to what degree students participated in this service; and to determine their success factors due to their participation. Because this research was conducted at one university in central Minnesota, this study is not generalizable to the general population. However, it does indicate a need for a regional or national study which identifies the potential benefits of LGBTQ resource centers, as well as their programming and services.

Several conceptual frameworks inform the foundation of this research study. Research and theories about student affairs in higher education indicate that students who feel engaged by their institution are more likely to remain at the institution and persist through graduation (Tinto, 1990). Several scholars have identified various theories for student identity development, as well as LGBTQ identity development (Astin, 1985; Cass, 1984; Chickering, 1969; Fassinger & Miller, 1996; Kuh, 2009; Lev, 2006). Additionally, a queer and intersectional framework (Crenshaw, 1989; Jagose, 1996; Mayo, 2015; Sullivan, 2003) is critical to understanding the

unique role that this study plays in attempting to determine relationships between identities and outcomes. These theories, as evidenced through the literature review, greatly informed the direction of this research study.

Across the United States, organizations such as Campus Pride and the Consortium of Higher Education Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Resource Professionals are dedicated to the work of improving, promoting, and increasing the number of LGBTQ resource centers nationwide. The scholars and professionals who belong to these organizations, and who advocate for this work, have developed several surveys and studies that were designed to benchmark, “colleges and universities to create safer, more inclusive campus communities” (Campus Pride, 2016b). This former research will be adapted and included in this study. This method will gauge student experiences and successes to determine if there are correlations with their participation in the LGBT Resource Center, and its programming and services.

Research Questions

After consulting the research and uncovering the problem at present, several research questions guided this study. The overarching question is what impact, if any, do LGBTQ resource centers have on LGBTQ identified students at four-year colleges and universities. Although this research is not generalizable outside of SCSU, answers to this question can help to inform future (larger) studies that can conclude statements about national trends. The specific research questions addressed in this study follow:

- R₁: How is the academic success of LGBT students influenced by their engagement with the LGBT Resource Center?

R₂: How does a student's outness impact her/his/their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center?

R₃: How does the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people predict a student's involvement in the LGBT Resource Center?

To help answer these questions, the researcher developed survey questions that ask how students are utilizing these services; and what the differences are between LGBTQ students who engaged with these services as compared to those students who are not? Answering these questions aided in understanding what services students are using, and perhaps which services are less valuable or under-utilized. Surveying all students and isolating responses from LGBTQ students who are and are not engaged, created a baseline comparison. This helped to determine if it was LGBTQ students' involvement in the LGBTQ services, or if it was involvement in general that had an impact. Similarly, the researcher drew comparisons between engaged and less-engaged students, which may indicate services that need improvement, or the importance of engagement as an LGBTQ identified student. To address these questions, the researcher developed several research hypotheses.

Research Hypotheses

The research questions mentioned above have informed the following research hypotheses (stated as null hypotheses and matched to their corresponding research question via their research question sub-numbers):

R₁: How are LGBTQ students' academic success influenced by their engagement with the LGBT Resource Center?

- R₁H₁: Engagement a student has with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their GPA.
- R₁H₂: Engagement a student has with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their intent to return (retention).
- R₁H₃: A student's sexual orientation or gender identity will have no impact on her/his/their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center.
- R₁H₄: The type of engagement by the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on the GPA or intent to return (retention) of students.
- R₂: How does a student's outness impact her/his/their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center?
- R₂H₁: A student's involvement with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their outness?
- R₂H₂: A student's outness will have no impact on her/his/their frequency of participation/attendance at the LGBT Resource Center.
- R₂H₃: A student's outness will have no impact on her/his/their GPA.
- R₂H₄: A student's sexual orientation or gender identity will have no impact on her/his/their outness.
- R₃: How does the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people impact a student's involvement in the LGBT Resource Center?
- R₃H₁: The perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on a student's engagement with the LGBT Resource Center.

R₃H₂: A student's involvement with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and/or administrators will have no impact her/his/their perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people.

R₃H₃: The perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on the student's intent to return (retention).

R₃H₄: The perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on the student's GPA.

The overarching research questions informed the development of these hypotheses and ultimately the survey instrument. Inquiry about these hypotheses required a variety of questions to expose the depth and core of this study. These research questions, hypotheses, and instrument yielded answers about the efficacy of this type of resource and programming on the success and engagement of its students.

Purpose of the Study

As was previously noted, the purpose of this study was to determine what impact LGBTQ resource centers, programming and services have on students who identify as LGBTQ. In times of budget crises, institutions of higher education are seeking ways to minimize costs, while also maximizing student benefits and services. One result of this phenomenon is that administrators are tasked with eliminating programming and services that are under-utilized, or those programs that do not yield tangible and purposeful outcomes. Diversity and inclusion initiatives aside, it may become important for LGBTQ services to provide data that speaks to the outcomes of this type of programming even if outcomes are not necessarily indicative of

successful programming. The purpose of this study was to yield results that address this problem: how is this service benefitting LGBTQ students?

Additionally, quantitative research about the experiences and engagement of LGBTQ students has been all but absent in the literature. According to Rankin (2013), most of the literature “on LGBT students, however, is not empirical, but rather takes the form of advice or personal reflections based on experience” (p. 113). Although it is important to provide a rich narrative about the experiences of LGBTQ students, this study attempted to bolster the existing narrative with a quantitative analysis in the hopes of critiquing, improving and, ultimately, increasing LGBTQ services on college campuses.

Assumptions of the Study

The first assumption of this study was that the sample actually reflects the attitudes, opinion, engagement, and success of LGBTQ identified students. This is achieved by the second assumption – that all students answered all survey items truthfully and honestly. Students will be self-reporting their identity, engagement, and success, so relying on their honesty in reporting was important for this study. The survey results remained anonymous and confidential, and no identifying information (name, student identification number, etc.) was collected. These parameters, working as a veil of anonymity, encouraged students to answer truthfully.

Similarly, the researcher assumed that the sample was representative of the LGBTQ population at SCSU. By sampling the entire university, it was expected that LGBTQ students who were not actively engaged with LGBTQ student life also self-reported their engagement and success on campus, thus providing beneficial insight into how these students perform academically and socially. This group of student participants revealed a comparison base which

was juxtaposed with those students who (at varying levels) are engaged with the LGBTQ resource center, programming and services.

Additional assumptions (specifically about the population and subject matter) are that student engagement leads to greater success and retention for undergraduate students (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 1990). This higher education principle and common claim in the field, as was previously noted, is what inspires the research questions.

Delimitations

It is important to restate the idea that research that considers sexual orientation and gender identity as primary variables can be challenging because these identities are not easily located. Consider the idea that admissions applications for undergraduate enrollment (and graduate enrollment) in colleges and universities almost never ask a student to self-identify their gender identity or sexual orientation (Crowhurst & Emslie, 2014; Johnson et al., 2013). For this reason, distributing a campus wide survey that asks students to self-report gender identity and sexual orientation will yield a variety of results that attempted to overcome the challenge of doing research with invisible minorities.

To synthesize the data, all students who reported a gender identity other than cisgender, and/or a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, were considered as identifying with a sexual/gender-minority identity along the LGBTQ spectrum. It was expected that many students in this category would identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender, therefore specific analysis that addressed these individual identities was employed. The methodology section of this study expounds this process. Otherwise, the full list of identities is reported in Chapter IV to illustrate a more wholesome picture of the depth and breadth of gender and sexual identities with

which students self-identify. Queer theory addresses the negative consequences of the collective identity framework. The collective identity framework includes the process of lumping together identities to affect change or to bolster visibility among differently identified others (Giesen & Seyfert, 2016). Although there are many positive social outcomes of the collective identity framework, one negative consequence can be the minimizing or erasure of the identities with which it seeks to incorporate. Naming identities, in this way, can be viewed as a micro-level form of social justice. This study employed that technique in order to correct the negative consequences of a collective identity framework.

Similarly, the purpose of this study was not to identify similarities or differences that result from variables outside of gender identity and sexual orientation. As such, race and ethnicity are not explicitly considered when looking at the experiences of students who participate in the LGBT Resource Center. However, the existing research (especially those employing an intersectional framework) does illustrate that factors such as race, ethnicity, nation-of-origin, sex, age, socio-economic status, and other variables will impact the student experience. Intersectionality (as discussed in Chapter II) accounts for the unique characteristics that make up an individual's personality. Although it is important to understand the purpose and function of intersectionality, the researcher sought to determine correlations that are based on one common experience—identifying as LGBTQ. The data analysis section does report the findings based on non-LGBTQ identities where they are significant, however, a much more comprehensive literature review and analysis that specifically addressed these complex identities is necessary to begin to understand the experiences of these unique and multi-faceted identities.

This in-depth analysis is important, especially as these identities pertain to benefitting (or not) from LGBT resource centers, programming and services.

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Cisgender/Cis. This term describes a person whose gender identity matches the sex that was assigned at birth. According to Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER) (2016):

Cisgender/cis [is the] term for someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth. The term cisgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life.

LGBTQ. This acronym denotes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer identity. In this study, with the exception of “queer,” students will self-select one of these gender or sexual minority identities. This acronym is being used as an umbrella terms and is likened to similar acronyms such as LGBTQIA++ (. . . intersex, allies, and including all other sexual and gender identities), LBTTQQAAP (. . . questioning, intersex, allies, asexual, agender, pansexual), GSD (gender and sexual diversities), etc. In order to concisely and recognizably state this concept, but with critical awareness of the historical erasure of identities and the importance of named identities (Pilcher, 2016), the acronym LGBTQ will signify any student who identifies as non-heterosexual and/or non-cisgender. This includes, but is not limited to, the previously listed identities.

LGBTQ Resource Centers/LGBT Resource Center. In this study LGBTQ resource centers is stated to describe all LGBTQ resource centers, programming and services. When “the LGBT Resource Center” is stated, it is referring to the specific center at St. Cloud State

University. It can be assumed that either identifier refers to the physical space as well as the respective programming and services that each offers.

Outness. The degree to which an individual is open about their sexual orientation or gender identity. The level of outness may differ by relationship type (e.g. family, friends, classmates, co-workers, etc.).

Student engagement. Student engagement has been described in a variety of ways, and is often described relative to student success outcomes (described below). For the purposes of this study, this term describes a student's connection to the institution through experience, social impact, and connections with peers, faculty, staff and administration.

Student success. Kuh (2006) described student success, "in a broad, all-encompassing manner to include academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives including graduation, and post-college performance" (p. 3).

They/them/their. When used as a singular form, they/them/there is the most commonly accepted gender-neutral pronoun(s) to describe individuals whose gender identity fall outside of the ascribed gender binary (LaScotte, 2016). According to recent changes to acceptable pronoun usage announced by the Associated Press (Easton, 2017), "they/them/there is acceptable in limited cases as a singular and-or gender-neutral pronoun . . . [and] if they/them/their use is essential, explain in the text that the person prefers a gender-neutral pronoun."

Role of the Researcher

It is imperative to state that the researcher's bias contributed to the development of this study. The researcher's identity as a member of the LGBTQ community, as a queer activist, and

as the director of the LGBT Resource Center at SCSU have contributed to the assumption that LGBTQ identified students who are engaged with the LGBT Resource Center are more engaged and successful than those who do not. However, the researcher was open to the idea that there would be no correlation or that students who are engaged have worse academic outcomes and retention rates. The goal of this research was to provide a snapshot of what outcomes (positive or negative) can be expected from students who participate in LGBTQ resource centers, services, and programming.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether (and how) involvement in, and engagement by, the LGBT Resource Center impacts the success, engagement, retention, and overall experience of LGBTQ students at a four-year regional comprehensive university in central Minnesota. During a time when budget crises are requiring student support services to provide tangible outcomes for the impact that their offices have on students, it is important for LGBTQ resource centers to provide detailed and data-driven results that support their mission statements. That was the primary goal of this study. A secondary goal of this study, but of equal importance, was an opportunity to determine what practices to foster through these services, and perhaps to reconsider those practices that seem to have little or no impact. Most importantly, this research provides an opportunity to be reminded that student affairs work is about students.

This study identifies existing research that helped to direct this study; provides definitions for less familiar terms that will clarify the scope of this research; and expounds a detailed explanation of the methodology. An analysis of the results follows the methodology in Chapter III. The analysis will provide answers to the aforementioned questions about LGBTQ student

success, retention, and engagement. Afterwards, the discussion explores outcomes of the analysis, limitations, and areas of future study.

Chapter II indicates the thrust of this study, and what theoretical frameworks were employed to inform the research. Major themes include campus climate, LGBTQ resource centers, queer theory and intersectionality, LGBTQ identity development and student identity development, research about the LGBTQ community, and student engagement and involvement. Exploring these concepts in greater depth, in Chapter II, informed the methodology that is outlined in Chapter III.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The relevant literature concerning LGBTQ resource centers and the effects that they have on LGBTQ students consists of several key themes. The first major theme in the literature is the campus climate for LGBTQ people and how it impacts a student's ability to be successful in higher education. The campus climate often predicts the presence of an LGBTQ resource center. A small pocket of literature exists that directly addresses the functioning of LGBTQ resource centers, and several consortiums and professional organizations exist who directly measure these outcomes. Additionally, the role of student identity development and sexual orientation/gender identity development, as well as what it means to engage students through this development was present throughout much of the literature. Several secondary themes emerged, including queer theory and intersectionality. but most notably is the increasing visibility of LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff on college campuses. As evidenced below, many gaps in the literature on LGBTQ students exist, namely the effect that LGBTQ resource centers have on student success and retention.

Campus Climate

A major theme that impacts the existence (or effectiveness) of LGBTQ student resources (including resource centers, programming, and services) is the campus climate. Student resources and services that may impact LGBTQ students can include campus policies, safe space training, and the presence of an LGBTQ resource center (Campus Pride, 2016a). However, this list is not exhaustive, and additional initiatives can also impact the success of LGBTQ students including the additional presence of LGBTQ student organizations and programming.

Campus climate is determined by a variety of factors. According to Campus Pride (2016b), the leading LGBTQ campus climate surveyors, these factors may include LGBTQ-friendly practices and inclusive LGBTQ policies, support and institutional commitment, academic life, student life, housing; campus safety, counseling and health, and recruitment and retention efforts). These practices are reinforced by the literature, which notes that the classroom experiences of LGBTQ identified students will influence their perceptions of the campus climate (Garvey, Taylor, & Rankin, 2015). Zamani-Gallaher and Choudhuri (2016) noted that research, historically, on campus climate has not taken “LGBTQ community college or 2-year institutions into account” (p. 48).

As has been previously noted, determining the experiences of LGBTQ students is difficult to collect because the population is considered an invisible minority. Furthermore, most universities do not collect demographic data about gender identity and sexuality, which makes difficult the process of determining the retention rates of LGBTQ students (Crowhurst & Emslie, 2014; Johnson et al., 2013). This may be indicative of larger structural-institutional barriers, such as whether or not the institution (or their governing board) is willing to ask questions about gender identity and sexual orientation on intake forms and application materials. The research also highlights that those students who are out about their LGBTQ identity, especially for those who identify as transgender, report lower levels of satisfaction with campus policies and campus resources (Garvey & Rankin, 2014). This is probably due to the student’s awareness of inequity and inequality on campus.

Campus climate for LGBTQ students has traditionally focused on three areas: “(a) the perceptions and experiences of LGBT people, (b) perceptions about LGBT people and their

experiences, and (c) the status of policies and programs designed to improve academic, living and work experiences of LGBT people on campus” (Renn, 2010, p. 134). Renn noted that when an organization attempts to do this research, it signals to LGBTQ people and their allies that the institution is committed to improving the campus climate for LGBTQ people.

One barrier to the improvement of the campus climate is the inability to say, with certainty, how many students identify as a member of the LGBTQ community. As was mentioned in chapter one, most colleges and universities do not ask questions about sexual orientation and gender identity on admissions materials (Crowhurst & Emslie, 2014) when collecting other demographic questions about identity (including race, ethnicity, sex, educational attainment of parents, and socio-economic status). While it could be argued that asking about sexual orientation and gender identity might result in discriminatory practices, it is worth noting that completing the demographic sections of these applications are often optional. Additionally, a student’s ability to self-report an identity provides an opportunity for an institution to have more certainty about who their students are, and what types of support services they might need. Further, asking these types of questions would make research about LGBTQ student success and engagement a more accessible endeavor. This is just one policy change that can affect the way student affairs professionals serve their LGBTQ students and improve campus climates.

Although some institutions have introduced formalized inclusive policies that have helped to improve the campus climate, according to Cramer and Ford (2011) “the fear or experience of customary and irrational prejudice remains a common problem for LGBT students and members of the faculty and staff” (p. 39). These fears result from blatant homophobia and heterosexism, but also result from micro-aggressions that target sexual and gender minorities

(Woodford, Chonody, Kulick, Brennan, & Renn, 2015). A survey conducted by Rankin (2005) showed that 74% of students, 73% of faculty and staff, and 81% of administrators perceived their campus as being homophobic. To challenge homo-negativity and trans-negativity on campus, services such as safe space trainings have been introduced “to train a group of individuals from a number of campus communities to provide secure havens for [LGBT] students, staff or faculty in need” (Alvarez & Schneider, 2008, p. 71). And according to Fine (2012) LGBTQ resource centers have been introduced as “campus spaces dedicated to the success of sexual minority students” (p. 285).

LGBT Resource Centers

Originating in 1971 at the University of Michigan, the first LGBTQ resource center was created “in response to a perceived homophobic climate, as were many other resource centers founded through the 1980s and early 1990s” (Fine, 2012, p. 285). The LGBT Resource Center at St. Cloud State University was founded in the late 1990s during a hostile national climate, not long after the death of Matthew Shepard. The murder of this young gay man in Laramie, Wyoming was highly publicized and resulted in national legislation, as well as the proliferation of LGBTQ resource centers on college campus (Fine, 2012). According to recent research by Self (2015), LGBTQ resource centers have existed for nearly 45 years and yet a large body of literature focuses on the implementation and functioning of LGBTQ resource centers, but has yet to focus on the theoretical and practical foundations (e.g., what are the actual outcomes of these services).

LGBTQ resource centers are specifically oriented toward serving the needs of sexual and gender minority students by providing academic, social, and emotional support (Fine, 2012).

According to a survey conducted by Fine (2012), LGBTQ resource centers are most likely to exist in large, public universities with resources (money) available to provide these spaces. Further, Fine noted that political climates at these institutions tend to be more liberal. Despite this intention, trans* students feel less connected and supported by LGBTQ resource centers (Marine & Nicolazzo, 2014). This calls to question whether LGBTQ student's experiences in college are improved on campuses with LGBTQ resource centers, and what effect these centers have on the campus climate in general.

To date, literature on LGBTQ resource centers details their foundation and establishment at various institutions (Ritchie & Banning, 2001; Sanlo, 2004;). This same literature explicated the importance of LGBTQ resource centers in bringing the larger gay rights movement to campus, as well as revealing what institutional types are more likely to have an LGBTQ resource center (Fine, 2012). For example, institutions in the West, Midwest, Great Lakes, and Mountain regions are more likely to have an LGBTQ resource center than those institutions in the South, Southwest, New England and Mid-Atlantic regions (Fine, 2012).

The literature on LGBTQ resource centers (and their impact) is sparse. A great deal of literature is dedicated to the experiences of LGBTQ students on campus (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Garvey et al., 2015;), but does not explicitly explore the role that resource centers have played in those experiences. One reason (that has become a major theme in this paper) is that colleges and universities usually do not have the demographic data to support research on LGBTQ students or resource centers. Consider that when higher education professionals compare the success of racial minorities who are and are not involved in support services, that this information can be pulled from a data-base that has been institutionally sanctioned (e.g., how

many students, what races, what programs they are involved in, etc.). This is not the case with LGBTQ students.

Queer Theory and Intersectionality

The role of queer theory and intersectionality is paramount to this study because it informs the challenges that LGBT resource centers face, as well as the difficulty of determining the success of intervening programs or services with LGBTQ participants. At the core of these theoretical concepts is the idea that people have complex identities and, additionally, a challenge to assumptions about what identities have been categorized or prioritized as *normal*.

Queer theory attempts to challenge and consequently destabilize normative structures (Sullivan, 2003). According to Sullivan (2003), “Queer (Theory) is constructed as a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices and (political) positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities” (pp. 43-44). From this theoretical lens, scholars (Jagose, 1996; Sullivan, 2003) have indicated that attempting to define queer is “un-queer” because determining characteristics of queer theory and identities creates a new normal for what it means to be queer. But, what challenge does this present for LGBT resource centers?

As a result of the changing landscape of identity politics, more people are identifying their sexual orientation and gender identity in a variety of ways. Identities such as gender-fluid, gender-non-conforming, agender, asexual and queer, to name a small few, reflect a notion that identities are no longer situated within the normative binary system (e.g. man or woman, boy or girl, straight or gay). LGBT resource centers are tasked with providing support services for all gender and sexual minorities, as well as educating the campus community about these identities. However, education efforts involve defining what different queer identities mean—a premise that,

as was previously noted by Sullivan (2003), is “un-queer.” Therefore, the major challenge is to affirm, validate, and provide support services for all gender and sexual minorities, without categorizing these identities. While, also, helping to develop campus-wide policies that promote an understanding of gender and sexual minorities without providing firm definitions for what these identities mean. In short, this work is *queer work* and it is confounded by the intersectional identities of each student.

Intersectionality, according Mayo (2015), “pushes us away from simple subjectivity and into both the relationships among aspects of identity that comprise a single subject, as well as the social relationships that reflect the other meanings” (p. 244). Simply put, intersectionality describes all the individual characteristics, experiences, as well as, social, relational and environmental interactions that make up a person or (sometimes) a group of people. To illustrate this, one might imagine that all our identities, social statuses, group memberships, and characteristics exist on individual lines, and all those lines are different shapes and sizes depending on how they have impacted our lived experiences. Intersectionality would describe the point at which all those identities converge to make up our individual experience and personhood. But what impact does this have on our lived experience in the social world?

Crenshaw (1989), who coined the term intersectionality, believes that intersectionality truly describes our unique experiences with marginalization, oppression and privilege. Through the exploration of race and sex discrimination, Crenshaw stated “dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis” (p. 140). From this framework, intersectionality challenges social critics to

view oppression from a multi-axial vantage, rather than assuming that an individual's social experience is attributable to one individual characteristic. And according to McLaughlin (2017),

If a student were to be asked to assimilate themselves and their experiences into a singular, dominant narrative around [only] one of those identities, then they would be asked to recreate the same systems that have refused to value their own unique and important perspectives. (p. 4)

This application of intersectionality to the identities of LGBTQ students suggests a queer critique of identity whereby the researcher employing this framework emphasizes the unique experiences of an individual with multiple identity characteristics.

This uniquely situates LGBTQ students (and all students) who are not only defined by their gender identity and sexual orientation but by factors such as socio-economic status, parent's education level, race, ethnicity, and a seemingly infinite list of other characteristics. As a result, intersectionality can be experienced personally (e.g. the experience of one gay, Chinese-American student) or recognized through systemic analysis (transgender students access to higher education in the state of Minnesota). However, we have specific mechanisms to measure many of these other identity characteristics (e.g. U.S. census, admissions applications, etc.) but we do not have an accurate way of knowing or describing the experiences of LGBTQ students because LGBTQ identity is not measured and is not a visible identity characteristic.

LGBTQ Demographic Data

The population of LGBTQ people in the United States is a widely debated (and researched) number. Thus, determining the number of participants needed to effectively measure this population is challenging. It has been commonly understood that approximately 10.0% of

the population identifies as LGBTQ. This number, however, has many competing factors. In 2013, the United States Department of Health and Human Services released the results of a survey that sampled the nation on a variety of factors including sexual identity. They determined that approximately 3.4% of the population *identified* as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or “something else” (Ward, Dahlhamer, Galinsky, & Joestl, 2013). Research on sexual *experiences, attitudes, and identity* yields a distinctly different number. In their study, Twenge, Sherman, and Wells (2016), found that,

4.3% of participants identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in the General Social Survey of US Adults, [which includes] about half of the 9.0% who have had a same-sex sexual experience as an adult. This suggests that about half of those who have same-sex sexual experiences identify as heterosexual. (p. 25)

It is important to note that these statistics do not include gender identity in their measures. A recent study indicates that about 0.6% of the population identifies as transgender (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016) but it is unclear whether individuals who identify as gender-non-conforming, gender queer, etc. are included in this statistic. These numbers suggest that approximately 5.0% of adults identify as LGBTQ, and that another 4.0% engage in same-sex sexual activity or behaviors at some point in their adult life. This study will focus only on students at SCSU who self-identify as LGBTQ, and will not survey students about their sexual behaviors and experiences.

One factor worth considering is previous data about this distinct population. As was previously mentioned, LGBTQ identified students at SCSU were surveyed in 2012, with approximately 7.29% identifying as LGBTQ (St. Cloud State University, 2012). The average of

these percentages reveals that approximately 6.0% of the SCSU student population will identify as LGBTQ. Therefore, of the 13,629 undergraduate students who are enrolled at SCSU, approximately 820 will identify as LGBTQ. At a confidence level of 95.0%, and a margin of error of $\pm 5.0\%$, where $N = 820$, the desired sample size is $n = 262$ (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). To access this sample size, a campus wide survey was distributed that asks students to self-identify their sexual orientation and gender identity.

LGBTQ Students and Identity Development

Many colleges and universities have explicit goals that outline diversity initiatives designed to foster an educational community that embraces all identities. Student development theories and identity development theories provide a myriad of explanations about why students with their varying identities need to feel engaged and supported by their institution. Tinto's *Theory of Retention* (1990) reinforced the claim that students who feel engaged and supported by their institution are more likely to stay at the institution than those who feel disconnected. In this same theory, Tinto revealed that social isolation is a major reason for student departure. Because LGBTQ resource centers can serve as social environment, LGBTQ students may experience less social isolation if they are actively involved in the space.

LGBTQ college students are experiencing student identity development alongside their LGBTQ identity. Chickering (1969) introduced the seven vectors of student identity development including (a) competence, (b) ability to manage emotions, (c) autonomy and interdependence, (d) development of interpersonal relationships, (e) identity establishment, (f) developing purpose and (g) developing emotions. While LGBTQ students work through these stages, they are simultaneously working through their LGBTQ identity development. These

seven vectors are similar to LGBTQ identity development, in that people both progress and regress through the stages.

Cass (1984) outlined the stages of lesbian and gay identity development, which is sometimes applied to bisexual identities as well. She proposed six stages of homosexual identity development that begins with cognitive dissonance and ends with identity cohesion. These six stages include: (a) identity confusion, (b) identity comparison, (c) identity tolerance (d) identity acceptance, (e) identity pride, and (f) identity synthesis. Cass suggested that an individual does not necessarily experience every stage and that stage progression is dependent on the individual and his/her/their environment. Fassinger and Miller (1996) later adapted and updated this theory. This updated model reinforced Cass' model, but simplified the stages and attempted to more accurately describe the experience of gay men. Their stages consisted of (a) awareness, (b) exploration, (c) deepening/commitment, and (d) internalization/synthesis (Fassinger & Miller, 1996).

Lev (2006) introduced a similar identity based model for transgender and gender-non-conforming identities to address the differences experienced by transgender people. The stages for transgender identity development in this model include: (a) awareness, (b) seeking information/reaching out, (c) disclosure to significant others, (d) exploration—identity and self-labeling, (e) exploration—transition issues/possible body modification, and (f) integration—acceptance and post-transition issues (Lev, 2006). Fassinger and Miller (1996) contend that lesbian and gay identity development (with an emphasis on intersectional identity development) is a reciprocal process between sexual identity development and group membership identity. Simply stated, LGB (Trans identity is not included in this framework) people experience identity

development and community identity development uniquely, but the experiences are intertwined and are not mutually exclusive. They also highlighted that the experiences of identity development by lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men are all different. Thus, these theorists suggest that identity development is strongly linked to a sense of community. By linking the works of these theorists, it is clear that LGBT students, who are experiencing both student and LGBTQ identity development, need to feel supported by their community in order to continue in their development while also persisting through their college career. LGBTQ resource centers play this role at colleges and universities through creating a student-friendly and LGBTQ-friendly environment.

LGBTQ identity development theories have been utilized by scholars (Renn, 2007) to describe the experiences of LGBTQ student leaders at colleges and universities. Specifically it has been used to help researchers and practitioners understand at what stage in identity development LGBTQ student leaders are in, and how the developmental stage informs their work (Renn, 2007; Renn & Bilodeau, 2005). It does not, however, address what stage of identity development students are in overall, because students are matriculating into higher education at many stages of their identity development. Further, there is no research that suggests a correlation between LGBTQ identity development and likelihood of participation in LGBTQ programs and services.

In general, new students in college are bringing a variety of experiences with them to campus. In addition, LGBTQ students bring a new layer of complex identities. Although the experiences of LGBTQ students before attending college varies, many have experienced bullying, harassment, or discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Between 20% and 75% of LGBTQ youth have experienced some form of harassment or discrimination at school (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Palmer, 2014). Statistics vary depending on type of harassment, e.g. verbal harassment, physical assault, relational aggression, and electronic bullying (e.g. cyber-bullying). One result of this phenomenon is that LGBTQ youth are significantly more likely to attempt suicide (Johnson et al., 2013; Ston, et al., 2014). Because of the social climate for LGBTQ students, institutions are being challenged to provide services, programming and resources for and about LGBTQ students to be successful (and remain) in college.

Student Success and Engagement

What does success in college look like? A working definition of success is a student's GPA, campus involvement, connection to faculty, staff or other students, leadership roles, and the student's perception of the institution. Astin (1985), in his *Theory of Involvement*, noted that "students learn by becoming involved" (p. 36). Involvement is a student's connection to the institution through experience, social impact, and connections with peers, faculty, staff and administration. This ultimately leads to more positive outcomes for students. Ottenritter (2012) wrote, "students who are engaged with college, either through rich faculty-student contact, involvement in student clubs or groups, or interesting collaborative learning projects in the classroom . . . are more likely to be retained" (p. 534). While there are many studies that focus on the retention of college students, there are no studies that address the unique stressors experienced by LGBTQ students and how it impacts their retention and persistence to graduation (Sanlo & Espinoza, 2012). Further, no apparent literature exists that cross-examines retention with involvement in an LGBTQ resource center.

If LGBTQ resource centers, services and programming significantly benefit LGBT students, this may impact the way that administrators think about and prioritize these initiatives. One can postulate that since LGBTQ resource center provide the social supports that Kuh (2016) described, then LGBTQ students who are engaged in this way are more likely to be successful and persist through to graduation.

Existing research (Kuh, 2009) yielded evolving ideas about what student success and engagement means, and how it benefits the student and the college or university. According to Kuh (2009), who is considered to be an expert on student success and engagement, “the college experiences that matter most to desired outcomes are those that engage students at high levels in educationally purposeful activities” (p. 687). This, he explained, has been the focus of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE survey is the most widely used survey instrument that measures student engagement and involvement, and helps institutions in determining areas of growth to better serve students. According to the NSSE (2016a) website:

Student engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning.

Additionally, student engagement is important because it increases “the odds that all students will complete their studies and graduate with the knowledge and proficiencies they need to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century” (Kuh, 2016, p. 49). For the purposes of this study, student success is defined in “a broad, all-encompassing manner to include academic

achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives including graduation, and post-college performance” (Kuh, 2006). This study measured student’s academic achievement, engagement in purposeful activities, satisfaction, and persistence.

But how does this differently effect LGBTQ students? Kuh (2016) indirectly answered this question by pointing to the impact that complex cultural and social situations have on a student’s ability to persist through graduation. LGBTQ students arrive at college with a host of experiences, inclusive of their sexual and/or gender identities, and are often looking for ways to be supported and affirmed in their identities. The engagement and persistence of LGBTQ students is revealed in the results of the *2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender People* (Rankin et al., 2010). In the forward written by George Kuh, Kuh noted that the research pool for LGBTQ students is “all-too-thin,” but calls to “re-double efforts to create the conditions whereby all students and faculty . . . can flourish on college campuses” (p. 3). This call was in response to the eye-opening results of this study, which indicated that LGBTQ students experience disproportionate levels of discrimination and have a greater intention to leave. Specifically:

- LGBTQ students experienced significantly greater harassment and discrimination than their heterosexual allies and are seven times more likely to indicate that the harassment was based on sexual identity.
- LGBTQ students have more negative perceptions of campus climate than their heterosexual counterparts.

- LGBTQ students (70%, 76%, 64%) were significantly less likely than their straight/cis-gender allies to feel very comfortable or comfortable with the overall campus climate, their department/work unit climate, and classroom climate than their heterosexual counterparts (78%, 85%, and 76%).
- LGBTQ students more often seriously considered leaving their institution, avoided LGBTQ areas of campus, and feared for their physical safety due to their identity.
- LGBTQ students were more likely to disagree with their institutions response through its policies, procedures, programs and curriculum. (Rankin et al., 2010)

Since these identities can sometimes present challenges to educational attainment, higher education has been called to affirm and support student in their LGBTQ identities (Rankin et al., 2010). Because LGBTQ students experience an additional barrier to receiving an education (namely actual and perceived discrimination and/or harassment) colleges and universities must create safe campuses for students, so that they can participate in educationally purposive activities. Such barriers can include legal processes (e.g. name and sex records), mental health concerns, previous social isolation, adequate and informed healthcare, and the list goes on. Often this has been the work of LGBTQ resource centers by providing training, workshops, and visibility, which may promote LGBTQ student success and engagement on campus.

Kuh's (2009) work on engagement and developing supportive campus environments reveals several items that are indicators of engagement. Some of these success and engagement indicators include a: "Campus environments [that] helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.); Campus environment [that] provide the support you need to

thrive socially; Quality relationships with other students; Quality relationships with faculty members; Quality relationships with administrative personnel and offices” (Kuh, 2009, p. 683).

One outcome of the research on student engagement theory is a better understanding of the value of the college student’s experience with diversity (Kuh, 2013, p. 88). According to Kuh (2003):

First-year students are more likely to report that their institutions encourage contact with students from different backgrounds. This is likely due in part to schools’ promoting the importance of diversity during new student orientation, dorm-based activities, and first-year seminars. But by the senior year, most students live off campus and are less exposed to campus activities that promote diversity awareness and have fewer naturally occurring opportunities for interacting with people who are different. (p. 31)

Taken into consideration, this could influence an LGBTQ student’s access to, or familiarity with, an LGBTQ resource center, or its programming and services. Regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation, Kuh’s research on student engagement suggests that undergraduate underclassmen will have greater knowledge and exposure to an LGBTQ resource center programming and services than undergraduate upperclassman. It was expected that LGBTQ underclassman who participated in this study may reveal greater exposure and knowledge of the LGBT Resource Center and its programming and services than upperclassman.

Summary of the Review of the Literature

This literature review revealed several themes including the role that campus climate plays in predicting the presence of LGBTQ resource centers. Further, it revealed how that same climate impacts the ability for researchers to know who LGBTQ students are and whether they

experience the same levels of support and success as their cis-gender/heterosexual counterparts. Although there is very little literature on the role of LGBTQ resource centers on college campuses, the lack of data reveals the challenge to doing this type of research, namely showing that outcomes are attributable to the resource center rather than other interventions.

One challenge to this type of research is parsing out confounding variables and this is a clear challenge for this study. How do we know that LGBTQ resource center, programming, and/or other services attributed to the students' ability to be successful in lieu of other activities, programming or offices in which a student might be involved? The methodology section of this study attempts to address this confounding variable. Chapter III details the methodology of this study, including the research questions and hypotheses that guided the survey.

Chapter III: Methodology

As substantiated by the literature review, this study is both timely and beneficial to the work of LGBTQ resource center staff, university administrators, and to the general body of knowledge. This is a quantitative study that includes demographic data and survey questions about engagement, retention, and involvement. A quantitative approach was taken to contribute to (and compliment) the large body of qualitative research that exists about this population. This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- R₁: How is the academic success of LGBTQ students influenced by their engagement with the LGBT Resource Center?
- R₁H₁: Engagement a student has with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their GPA.
- R₁H₂: Engagement a student has with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their intent to return (retention).
- R₁H₃: A student's sexual orientation or gender identity will have no impact on her/his/their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center.
- R₁H₄: The type of engagement by the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on the GPA or intent to return (retention) of students.
- R₂: How does a student's outness impact her/his/their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center?
- R₂H₁: A student's involvement with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their outness?

R₂H₂: A student's outness will have no impact on her/his/their/their frequency of participation/attendance at the LGBT Resource Center.

R₂H₃: A student's outness will have no impact on her/his/their GPA.

R₂H₄: A student's sexual orientation or gender identity will have no impact on her/his/their outness.

R₃: How does the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people predict a student's involvement in the LGBT Resource Center?

R₃H₁: The perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on a student's engagement with the LGBT Resource Center.

R₃H₂: A student's involvement with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and/or administrators will have no impact her/his/their perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people.

R₃H₃: The perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on the student's intent to return (retention).

R₃H₄: The perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on the student's GPA.

Methodology

The researcher employed the following research methodology to answer these research questions and research hypotheses. As was previously noted, a great number of invaluable studies has already been conducted where researchers have qualitatively examined the experiences of LGBTQ college students. Research on LGBTQ college students yields results that include terms such as "attitudes . . . campus climate . . . experiences . . . perspective . . ." (Garvey

et al., 2015; Kosciw et al., 2014; Twenge et al., 2016; Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2016;). By using a survey, the researcher sought to determine whether there was a statistically significant relationship between involvement in an LGBTQ resource center, and students' academic success, overall engagement and retention. Measuring factors such as GPA, intent to return, outness, campus climate, and the level of involvement in the LGBT Resource Center was an opportunity to measure and test for these relationships. The research and resulting surveys are informed by student development theory and best practices for LGBTQ resource center student affairs professionals.

Participants

Participants in this study were students who identified as LGBTQ. To recruit LGBTQ participants, the survey was sent to all students at St. Cloud State University. All students who indicated that they were lesbian, gay, bisexual, another sexual orientation (for sexual orientation), and/or transgender, or another gender, were counted as LGBTQ individuals. The researcher had no control over who chose to participate in the survey. Rather, the researcher sent the survey to the population of students on campus, who in turn self-reported their participation and demographics that were included in the survey. Because LGBTQ students are an invisible minority, and because determining the actual number of LGBTQ students is quite difficult (if not impossible), this methodology represented the best scenario for accessing a large pool of LGBTQ students, which would have been limited by random sampling or stratified-random sampling. The consequences and outcomes of this method of survey dissemination are discussed at greater length in the limitations section of this study. The survey was open for approximately 48 hours before the survey closed. The researcher had a goal of n=262 for LGBTQ identified

students. 500 students responded to the survey overall and 124 participants identified as LGBTQ. The next section describes the instrument and data collection tool.

Research Design

The pilot e-survey was offered to students in the LGBT Resource Center to determine whether the questions were reliable. Approximately 15 students completed the pilot survey. Afterwards the researcher examined this false-data to ensure that the system was recording results properly and consistently. The researcher sent the open-link survey, electronically, to all students at St. Cloud State University. Students received an email inviting them to participate in the survey, with the incentive of a chance at winning 1-of-20 \$25.00 gift cards to the SCSU bookstore. The data was stored on the university contracted SurveyMonkey system with the principal researcher and the campus statistics office having sole access to the data. Confidentiality was maintained because students were not asked to report personally identifying information. The researcher provided a second link that, when opened, provides directions on how to enter the drawing for the \$25.00 gift cards. The end of the survey took participants to the LGBT Resource Center website.

Instrument and Data Collection

The researcher designed a survey (Appendix) that included original measures as well as adapted measures from other tools to contribute scholarly research to the general body of knowledge, which addresses outcomes for students engaging with LGBTQ resource centers. This helps to frame an understanding of the specific questions asked in the survey (e.g. asking about events sponsored by the LGBT Resource Center at SCSU, rather than asking generic questions to assess frequency). The survey contains four parts: *Background Information, Outness and*

Campus Relationships, Academic Achievement, and Campus Climate & Involvement. The full survey can be found in Appendix.

The first section asks participants to self-report demographic information (race, ethnicity, citizenship status, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.). This section (*Background Information*) is needed to address R₁, R₂ and R₃. In order to analyze the data, the researcher needed to first determine which students identify with an LGBTQ identity. The *Background Information* explicitly asks these questions, which ultimately yielded the true sample size whereby the researcher could run analyses to address the hypotheses. The *Background Information* was adapted from the Campus Climate (Rankin, 2003) survey. Only students who identify as LGBTQ could complete the entire survey, and in accordance to the Institutional Review Board at St. Cloud State University, all students (regardless of sexuality) were eligible to enter the drawing for the incentive.

The second section, *Outness and Campus Relationships*, inquired about the student's level of outness, the importance of their LGBTQ identity, and their interpersonal relationships with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators. The *Outness and Campus Relationships* section addressed R₂ and R_{3H2}. This section included two additional questions to contextualize outness by asking about the emphasis that an individual placed on her, his, or their LGBTQ identity, and to assess fear of discrimination. The outness question(s) were adapted from Rankin's (2003) campus climate survey and provided a link to deeper questions about on-campus relationships. The latter part of this section included questions about whether a participant has had an interpersonal relationship with LGBTQ faculty, staff and/or administrators. If a participant indicated they did have an interpersonal relationship with one of these actors, then the survey

prompted them to complete an additional Likert scale that asked about the nature and quality of those relationships. The relationship quality Likert scales were adapted from the *NSSE Survey* (2016b).

In the third section, *Academic Achievement*, the survey asked participants about their current academic achievement, credit completion, and their intent to return to the institution. In short, the *Academic Achievement* section profiled the participants' academic demographics. Intent to return, in this case, may inform long-term retention rates for participants. Because this study is not longitudinal, intent to return to the institution is an attempt to measure the potential retention rates of participants. This section aided in addressing research questions R₁, R₂, and R₃.

The last section of this survey (*Campus Climate and Involvement*) asked students to self-report their perception of the campus climate for LGBTQ people and to identify their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center, and its services and programs. For these reasons, this section addressed research questions R₁, R₂, and R₃. As is substantiated through the analysis, many students who identify as LGBTQ do not participate in the LGBT Resource Center. In consideration of this phenomenon, additional questions about outside participation in other resources, programming, and services were added to reveal if involvement, in general, improved the overall success, engagement, and retention of LGBTQ students. Several items in the *Campus Climate and Involvement* section were adapted from the Campus Climate Survey (Rankin, 2003) to gauge the participants' perspective of the campus climate for LGBTQ people. From this information, the researcher determined the participation in the LGBT Resource Center—information that practically benefited the functioning of the LGBT Resource Center.

Analysis

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the raw data. The researcher employed descriptive analyses and regression analyses, including one-way analyses, chi-squares, correlations, t-tests, and other statistical analyses to determine if there were any significant relationships or predictions within and between the variables. The descriptive analyses were used to study two variables, whereas the regression analyses were used to compare two or more variables. The key independent variables were LGBTQ identified students who are engaged with campus resources, and LGBTQ identified students who are not engaged with campus resources. The main dependent variables included a score of overall outness, grade point average, intent to return (retention), overall involvement, and campus climate.

Human Subject Approval

As required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at St. Cloud State University, approval for research was submitted to the IRB at the end of January 2017. The approval was sought before the survey was sent to students. The purpose of the IRB approval was to minimize risk and discomfort for students. The researcher did not foresee any harm for participants because of the discreet nature of this study (e.g. self-reporting on a secure and anonymous e-survey).

Timeline

The following was the timeline that the researcher followed to conduct, analyze and report the results of this study:

| Timeline | Task | Purpose/Phase |
|----------------------|--|----------------------|
| <i>December 2016</i> | <i>Thesis Proposal</i> | Research Design |
| <i>January 2017</i> | <i>IRB Submission</i> | Research Design |
| <i>March 2017</i> | <i>Disseminate Survey</i> | Data Collection |
| <i>April 2017</i> | <i>Data Analysis (Analysis Team at SCSU)</i> | Data Analysis |
| <i>June 2017</i> | <i>Thesis Defense</i> | Data Dissemination |

Summary

Chapter III outlined the research process for this study. Surveying students about their sexual orientation and gender identity; as well as their involvement in the LGBT Resource Center; their interpersonal relationships with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators; and the extent to which they are involved, will help to determine if there is a relationship between their engagement, success, retention (intent to return), and overall grade point average. In Chapter IV the results are discussed, including an explanation of the statistical tests that were employed as well as a more thorough description of the sample pool.

Chapter IV: Analysis

The purpose of this research was to determine whether involvement with or engagement by an LGBTQ resource center effected an LGBTQ student's overall success in higher education.

To test the research question, the researcher designed a survey (Appendix) that included original measures as well as adapted measures from other tools. The survey was shared, via e-mail, with all students at St. Cloud State University through the Student Life and Development Office, for twenty-four hours. Chapter IV expounds the results of this survey by reviewing the analysis that was conducted for each hypothesis. Afterwards, the data is synthesized to highlight major findings.

Results

Descriptive Data

Seven hundred and eighty students completed the LGBT Resource Center survey. Of the total 780 completed surveys, 280 were removed because the data pool become partially contaminated. Therefore, 500 surveys were considered completed. To determine the sample of LGBTQ survey participants, the researcher identified all survey respondents who indicated an LGBTQ identity in their responses to questions one and two (e.g. what is your gender identity; what is your sexual orientation) and excluded the remaining results from the data analysis. Of the 500 completed surveys, the resulting pool of LGBTQ students was $N = 124$.

The pool of LGBTQ participants was diverse and included a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities. Because the number of participants who identified as transgender was low, and to make data analysis more advantageous, the researcher included all gender-non-conforming identities, that were submitted as another gender identity in the open-

ended response box, into the larger gender identity category: transgender. The identities that were included into the category transgender are: agender, gender-fluid, queer, gender-neutral, and trans-woman. These identities are listed to shed light on depth of gender identities with which students identified, aside from the cis-normative identities that are regularly listed. This increased the pool of transgender identified participants from 4 to 13. The rationale for this decision was that moving these identities allowed the researcher to determine effect sizes with a larger sub-sample. Additionally, this is a standard practice when doing research with the gender-non-conforming community because it allows researchers to gather information about those “who may be considered transgender from a demographic perspective, even if they do not identify with the term ‘transgender,’ such as people who identify as genderqueer, agender, or having no gender” (Meerwijk & Sevelius, 2017, p. 2).

A similar approach was used to identify sexual orientations from the open-ended responses for this question. The identities that this question yielded were: asexual, biromantic, demisexual, no sexual orientation, pansexual, queer, straight, unsure, and women. These identities are listed to shed light on depth of sexual orientation with which students identified, aside from the homo/hetero-normative identities that are regularly listed. However, these identities could not be moved into a pre-defined identity label, because these identities do not line up in the same way. For example, someone who identifies as asexual could not be easily moved into the bisexual category, because the definition of that identity does not sensibly relate to the definition bisexual identity. Asexual describes a person who does not usually have sexual attractions, while bisexuality describes someone who has attractions to two genders. For this reason, the researcher included all other identities into a category labeled “Other,” for analysis

purposes. This, however, does not imply that the identities within that category are related to each other or necessarily mean that the identities are similar in meaning. Table 1 reports the descriptive frequencies for the identity demographics of the LGBTQ participants.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Identity (N = 124)

| | n | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Gender Identity | | |
| Women | 68 | 54.80% |
| Men | 43 | 34.70% |
| Trans/Other | 13 | 10.50% |
| Sexual Orientation | | |
| Bisexual | 53 | 42.70% |
| Gay | 25 | 20.20% |
| Lesbian | 18 | 14.50% |
| Heterosexual | 2 | 1.60% |
| Another Sexual Orientation | 26 | 21.00% |
| Citizenship Status | | |
| US Citizen (Born in US) | 101 | 81.50% |
| US Citizen (Naturalized) | 4 | 3.20% |
| Permanent Resident | 1 | 0.80% |
| International Student | 15 | 12.10% |
| Other | 3 | 2.40% |
| Race Ethnicity | | |
| African American/Black | 5 | 4.00% |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 16 | 12.90% |
| Middle Eastern | 3 | 2.40% |
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 1 | 0.80% |
| Chicano/Latino/Hispanic | 2 | 1.60% |
| White/Caucasian | 90 | 72.60% |
| More Than One Race/Ethnicity | 6 | 4.80% |
| <i>Missing</i> | <i>1</i> | <i>0.80%</i> |

Regarding gender identity for this sample, approximately 55% of LGBTQ participants identified as women (n=68), 35% identified as men (n=43), and 10% identified as transgender or another gender identity (n=13). The percentage of transgender identified participants, as was previously mentioned, includes those participants who listed another gender identity in the open-ended option for the gender identity question. Of the LGBTQ sample size, approximately 43% identified as bisexual (n=53), 15% identified as a lesbian (n=18), 20% identified as gay men (n=25), and 21% listed themselves as another sexual orientation (n=26). Additionally, approximately 1% (n=2) identified as heterosexual. Those who identified as heterosexual must have also indicated a gender-non-conforming identity to count in this sample. This reveals that the majority of participants identified their sexual orientation as bisexual. In terms of race/ethnicity, 4% identified as African American or Black (n=5), 13% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander (n=16), 2% identified as Middle Eastern (n=3), 1% identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native (n=1), 2% identified as Chicano/Latino/Hispanic (n=2), 73% identified as White/Caucasian (n=90), and 5% identified as more than one race or ethnicity (n=6).

In terms of student characteristics, Table 2 reports the class standing and other relevant characteristics of the survey participants:

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Student Identity (N = 124)

| Variable | n | Percentage |
|----------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Enrollment Status | | |
| Full-time | 109 | 87.90% |
| Part-time | 14 | 11.30% |
| <i>Missing</i> | 1 | 0.80% |
| Degree in Progress | | |
| Associate's Degree | 10 | 8.10% |
| Bachelor's Degree | 90 | 72.60% |
| Master's Degree | 17 | 13.70% |
| Doctoral Degree | 4 | 3.20% |
| <i>Missing</i> | 3 | 2.40% |
| Semesters Completed | | |
| 1-2 | 40 | 32.30% |
| 3-4 | 37 | 28.80% |
| 5-6 | 30 | 24.20% |
| 7-8 | 8 | 6.50% |
| 9+ | 5 | 4.00% |
| <i>Missing</i> | 4 | 3.20% |
| Credits Completed | | |
| 1-30 | 34 | 27.40% |
| 31-59 | 25 | 20.20% |
| 60-89 | 27 | 21.80% |
| 90-119 | 23 | 18.50% |
| 120+ | 11 | 8.90% |
| <i>Missing</i> | 4 | 3.20% |
| Intent to Return | | |
| Planning to Graduate | 104 | 83.90% |
| Planning to Drop Out | 5 | 4.00% |
| Planning to Transfer | 10 | 8.10% |
| <i>Missing</i> | 5 | 4.00% |

As shown in Table 2, a majority of the participants were full-time students (87.9%) who intended to graduate (83.90%). Although most students were undergraduate students, there was some variability between the number of semesters and credits completed by the participants. This

suggests a healthy sample of student types. The average GPA (n=115) for this sample was 3.38 and a standard deviation of 0.53 which indicates a moderately broad range of GPAs reported for this sample. Below the researcher explains the analysis applied to each null hypothesis and the yield of these analyses.

Research Question 1: LGBT Engagement and GPA

The first research question sought to determine if the academic success and intent to return to the university (retention) was effected by a student's engagement with the LGBT Resource Center. The analysis below explains the tests that were conducted to address each hypothesis for this research question.

Hypothesis 1.1. A one-way ANOVA, a simple regression analysis, and a posthoc test was used to test the overarching hypothesis to the first research question: engagement a student has with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their GPA. Engagement with the LGBT Resource Center was determined by the aggregate sum (and individual measures) of Questions 42, 43, and 47 (How often to you visit the LGBT Resource Center; If you have visited the LGBT Resource Center during this academic year, what was the purpose for your visit; What events have you attended that were sponsored the LGBT Resource Center or LGBT student organizations during this academic year). The mean score for LGBT involvement was 3.00 and this average was filled in for six participants to utilize a regression analysis. The investigation of that data concluded that involvement in the LGBT Resource Center did not have a significant impact on the GPAs of participants (Question 32) ($\beta = .033$, $t(115) = .355$, $p < .05$). Additionally, there were no significant impacts on GPA by their involvement in other support services on campus, nor were statistically significant impacts on GPAs by and of the sub-measures except

one. An independent sample T-Test confirmed that there was no significant difference in the GPAs of those who have attended ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.47$) and have not attended ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.56$) the LGBT Resource Center in the past year; conditions $t(116) = -.088$, $p = .930$.

However, the investigation did reveal that participants' GPAs were negatively impacted when they indicated more reasons for visiting the LGBT Resource Center ($\beta = -.327$, $t(34) = -2.021$, $p < .05$). However, this result was on the margin of significance and a larger sample size would be needed to determine whether the participants' GPAs were actually negatively impacted by having more reasons for visiting the LGBT Resource Center. This relationship accounted for 10.7% of the variance in LGBTQ students' GPAs ($R^2 = .107$, $F(1, 34) = 4.085$, $p < .05$) which means that this relationship was statistically significant for approximately 11% of all respondents. The posthoc test for the discreet measures of involvement in the LGBT Resource Center (e.g. Does that participant attend the LGBT Resource Center, or have they attended any events or programs) revealed that there was no significant difference in the means between GPAs of those who are an are not involved with the LGBT Resource Center. Because the overall involvement had no statistically significant impact on the GPAs of the participants, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Hypothesis 1.2. An independent samples t-test, a one-way ANOVA (with subsequent post hoc tests) and a step-wise regressions analysis were employed to address the second hypothesis for this research question: engagement a student has with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their intent to return. Engagement with the LGBT Resource Center was, as was previously described, determined by the aggregate sum (and individual measures) of Questions 42, 43, and 47 (how often to you visit the LGBT Resource Center; if you

have visited the LGBT Resource Center during this academic year, what was the purpose for your visit; and what events have you attended that were sponsored the LGBT Resource Center or LGBT student organizations during this academic year).

The analysis revealed that there were no statistically significant relationships between overall involvement in the LGBT Resource Center (or the sub-measures of LGBT involvement) and a student's intention of returning to the university (Question 35: When thinking about your time at St. Cloud State University, which of the following is most true for you: [1] I am planning to graduate; [2] I am thinking about dropping out of school; [3] I am definitely dropping out of school; [4] I am planning to transfer to another school before graduating). For the purpose of the analysis, planning to graduate was counted as a positive retention indicator, while the other three options were counted as negative retention indicators. Additionally, there were no significant relationships between involvement in other student support services and a student's intent to return to the university. These relationships were tested with a regression analysis and a one-way ANOVA by comparing Question 35 (intent to return) with Question 44 (how often do you visit other student support offices) and Question 45 (if you have visited other student support offices during this academic year, what was the purpose for your visit).

These results were consistent across tests, whereby the regression revealed no significant impact of the LGBT Resource Center and intent to return ($\beta = -.006$, $t(117) = .062$, $p < .05$); the one-way analysis of variance yielded no significant difference between those who planned to return to the university (retention) and their participation in the LGBT Resource Center's events and activities [$F(2, 110) = 0.705$, $p = 0.496$]; and the t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the means of those who are ($M = 0.81$, $SD = 0.40$) and are not involved ($M =$

0.88, SD = 0.33) with an LGBT Resource Center student organization and their intent to return to the university ($t(110) = -.675, p = .501$). Because there was no statistically significant relationship between involvement in the LGBT Resource Center and students' intent to return, the null hypothesis could not be rejected.

Hypothesis 1.3. A step-wise regressions analysis was employed to test the third hypothesis for this research question: A student's sexual orientation or gender identity will have no impact on her/his/their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center. The participants' sexual orientation was measured by question two ("What is your sexual orientation") and their gender identity was measured by Question 1 ("What is your gender identity") as discrete variables. Involvement in the LGBT Resource Center was (again) measured by the average score of involvement (Questions 42, 43, and 47) as well as the individual measures. The results revealed a significant positive relationship only between students who indicated "other" as their sexual orientation and their involvement in the LGBT Resource Center ($\beta = .193, t(122) = 2.173, p < .05$), where identifying as another sexual orientation accounted for 3.7% of the variance ($R^2 = .037, F(1, 122) = 4.722, p < .05$). The results of this test suggest that there is a relationship between having an "other" sexual orientation and involvement in the LGBT Resource Center, thus those who indicated an "other" sexual orientation are more likely to be involved in the LGBT Resource Center.

Hypothesis 1.4. A multiple regressions analysis for each dependent variable was used to test the fourth hypothesis for this research question: The type of engagement by the LGBT Resource Center (listed in the tables below) will have no impact on the GPA or intent to return (retention) of students. The results are shown in Tables 3 and 4:

Table 3

Regression for Retention and Involvement

Summary of the simple regression analyses for variables predicting an LGBTQ student's intent to return if they are involved in the LGBT Resource Center (N=118)

| Variable | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|---|--------|-------|---------|--------|-------|
| Social (visiting friends/community members) | -0.032 | 0.093 | -0.042 | -0.347 | 0.73 |
| Resource Access (computer, books, movies, etc.) | 0.153 | 0.129 | 0.148 | 1.184 | 0.239 |
| Student Organization Meeting | -0.27 | 0.135 | -0.27* | -2.004 | 0.047 |
| Other Meeting | 0.069 | 0.126 | 0.052 | 0.547 | 0.585 |
| Event | 0.227 | 0.12 | 0.214 | 1.89 | 0.061 |

**p < .05*

Table 4

Regression for GPA and Involvement

Summary of the simple regression analyses for variables predicting an LGBTQ student's GPA if they are involved in the LGBT Resource Center (N=118)

| Variable | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|---|-------|------|---------|--------|------|
| Social (visiting friends/community members) | .100 | .145 | .080 | .686 | .494 |
| Resource Access (computer, books, movies, etc.) | -.349 | .201 | -.211 | -1.735 | .085 |
| Student Organization Meeting | -.288 | .211 | -.179 | -1.365 | .175 |
| Other Meeting | .290 | .196 | .136 | 1.477 | .142 |
| Event | .229 | .188 | .134 | 1.218 | .226 |

**p < .05*

These regressions tested GPA (Question 32), intent to return to the university (Question 35) and reasons for accessing the LGBT Resource Center (matrix of Question 42). The results of the multiple regression analysis depicted in Table 3 shows that students who are involved in the LGBT Resource Center to participate in a student organization, have a statistically significant negative impact on their intent to return to the university than those who visit the LGBT Resource Center for another reason(s). However, this relationship is not statistically significant when a single regression is tested for the impact of student organization involvement through the LGBT Resource Center on a student's intent to return ($\beta = -.085$, $t(117) = -.919$, $p < .05$).

The multiple regressions analyses that are depicted in Table 4 reveal that there were no statistically significant results. However, when a simple regression was tested for each variable, separately, the results showed some statistical significance. Specifically, there was a negative impact on GPA for students who accessed the LGBT Resource Center for resources ($\beta = -.194$, $t(122) = -2.178$, $p < .05$) and for students who were attending student organization meetings ($\beta = -.183$, $t(122) = -2.054$, $p < .05$). Because the results are inconclusive, and due to the comprehensive nature of this hypothesis, the researcher could not reject the null. However, the sub-measures do indicate some relationships between the predictors.

The results of these hypotheses for the first research question are inconclusive because there was no consistent overall response. Because the results suggested several different outcomes (e.g. multiple reasons for attending is related to a lower GPA; no overall relationship between involvement and GPA or retention; students with some gender identities and sexual orientations will access the space more frequently than others) further testing would need to be employed to address these questions at greater depth.

Research Question 2: Outness and Involvement

The second research question sought to determine if a student's outness impacted his/her/their involvement with the LGBT Resource Center. An overall score for outness was measured by the aggregate score of Questions: 7=10 (Likert scales for outness to family, friends, classmates, and professors/faculty/staff); Question 11 (a Likert scale of the overall important of the students' LGBTQ identity); and Question 12 (A reverse-scored Likert scale which measures concealing sexual orientation and gender identity to avoid discrimination).

Hypothesis 2.1. A step-wise regressions analysis was used to test the first hypothesis for the second research question: a student's involvement with the LGBT Resource Center will have no impact on her/his/their outness. As described above, the independent variable for this measure was the aggregate score of involvement in the LGBT Resource Center (Questions 42, 43, and 47), and the individual factors that make up this score. The dependent variable was the aggregate score for outness (Questions 7-11 and Question 12 reverse scored). The mean score for LGBT involvement and Question 11 (an outness sub-measure) was 3.00, these were filled in seven participants who did not answer these questions. Filling in the mean scores for these measures allowed the researcher to employ a multiple regressions analysis. The results of this analysis showed that involvement in the LGBT Resource Center significantly affected the overall outness of LGBTQ participants, $\beta = .244$, $t(122) = 2.785$, $p < .01$. Involvement in the LGBT Resource Center accounted for 6% of the variance in the overall outness of LGBTQ participants ($R^2 = .060$, $F(1, 122) = 7.755$, $p < .01$).

When analyzing the LGBT Resource Center's impact on the individual factors of outness to family, classmates, and faculty/staff the relationship is still significant (outness to family: $\beta =$

.191, $t(122) = 2.144$, $p < .05$) (outness to classmates: $\beta = .272$, $t(122) = 3.123$, $p < .01$) (outness to faculty/staff: $\beta = .262$, $t(122) = 2.993$, $p < .01$). However, the LGBT Resource Center showed no significant impact on the participants outness to friends ($\beta = .131$, $t(116) = 1.424$, $p < .05$). An additional sub-factor of overall outness was whether participants deemed their LGBTQ identity as being important (Question 11). The results of this analysis showed that there was a significant positive relationship between an LGBTQ student's involvement in the LGBT Resource Center and their opinion about the importance of their LGBTQ identity ($\beta = .292$, $t(122) = 3.374$, $p < .001$).

To further determine whether the relationship was uniquely related to the LGBT Resource Center, or if it could be found elsewhere, the researcher analyzed the participants' involvement with other support services (Questions 44 and 45) and their overall outness (Questions 7-11 and Question 12 reverse scored). The results showed that involvement in other campus support services did not significantly impact the overall or individual factors for outness. The null hypothesis was rejected because overall involvement in the LGBT Resource Center had a statistically significant relationship with overall outness.

Hypothesis 2.2. A step-wise regressions analysis was employed for the second hypothesis for the second research question (A student's outness will have no impact on her/his/their frequency of participation/attendance at the LGBT Resource Center) to determine the strength of any potential affects. The first analysis for this hypothesis was to determine if a participant's overall outness (Questions 7-11 and Question 12 reverse scored) had an impact on the frequency of their visits to the LGBT Resource Center (Question 43). The mean score for overall outness was 3.00. This score was filled in for participants who did not answer (1

participant) which allowed the researcher to more accurately employ a multiple regressions analysis. Results of this regression analysis revealed that the students' overall outness had a statistically significant impact on their attendance in the LGBT Resource Center, $\beta = .237$, $t(116) = 2.625$, $p < .05$. Overall outness accounted for 6% of the variance in the frequency of visits to the LGBT Resource Center ($R^2 = .056$, $F(1, 116) = 6.889$, $p < .05$). This relationship remained statistically significant for the sub-measures: outness to faculty/staff; outness to classmates; and the importance of the participants' LGBTQ identity. There was no statistically significant relationship for the outness to family or outness to friend's sub-measures.

The comparative analysis of a participant's overall outness to attendance in other support services on campus revealed no statistically significant relationship ($\beta = .104$, $t(115) = 1.117$, $p < .05$). However, the impact of outness to family members on the frequency of visits to other campus support services was on the margin of significance ($\beta = .176$, $t(115) = 1.916$, $p < .05$) where outness to family attributed to 3.1% of the variance in the frequency of attendance in other support service offices. This null hypothesis was rejected because overall outness had a statistically significant impact on students' attendance in the LGBT Resource Center

Hypothesis 2.3. A simple regressions analysis was utilized to test the third hypothesis for the second research question: a student's outness will have no impact on her/his/their GPA. Overall outness was, again, measured by survey items (Questions 7-11 and Question 12 reverse scored) and their GPA was measured as a continuous variable (Question 32). The mean scores were filled in for those participants who did not answer the questions about outness ($\bar{x} = 3.00$; 1 participant) or GPA ($\bar{x} = 3.38$; 7 participants). The regression analysis for this affect showed that a student's overall outness had no statistically significant impact on their GPAs ($\beta = -.068$, $t(122)$

= -.757, $p < .05$). Additionally, except for one, the sub-measures of outness showed no statistically significant impacts on GPA. The analysis showed that a student's GPA is (slightly) negatively impacted when they also admit to concealing their LGBTQ identity out of fear of discrimination (Question 12) ($\beta = -.185$, $t(122) = -2.085$, $p < .05$). This effect accounted for 3.4% of the variance in responses. Although this finding was statistically significant, this null hypothesis was not rejected because the findings did not conclude that overall outness (as it has been defined) had an impact on students' GPAs.

Hypothesis 2.4. A multiple regressions analysis was employed to test the fourth hypothesis for the second research question: A student's sexual orientation or gender identity will have no impact on her/his/their outness. The students' overall outness was measured by survey items (Questions 7-11 and Question 12 reverse scored) The mean score was filled in for those participants who did not answer Question 11 ($\bar{x} = 3.00$; 1 participant). Gender identity and sexual orientations were measured by Question 6 (sexual orientation) and Question 7 (gender identity). In order to determine the effect of gender identity, solely, a dummy variable was used to measure transgender identities against the other unmeasured categorical options (e.g. men and women).

For gender identity, the analyses revealed that gender identity had a significant positive impact on outness overall ($\beta = .016$, $t(122) = 2.436$, $p < .05$) and outness to classmates ($\beta = .188$, $t(122) = 2.120$, $p < .05$) but only for transgender students. The same effect was measured for men and women who have a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. Those results are reported below:

Table 5

Regression for Lesbian Outness

Summary of the multiple regressions analysis for the impact of lesbian identity on reported level of outness. (N=123)

| Variable | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|------|
| Outness Overall | 3.836 | 1.651 | .218* | 2.323 | .022 |
| Outness to Family | 1.360 | .372 | .330*** | 3.658 | .000 |
| Outness to Friends | 1.101 | .377 | .273** | 2.992 | .004 |
| Outness to Classmates | .502 | .424 | .113 | 1.183 | .239 |
| Outness to Faculty/Staff/ Administrators | .418 | .426 | .094 | .981 | .329 |

p < .05; **p < .01; *p < .001*

Table 6

Regression for Gay (Male) Outness

Summary of the multiple regressions analysis for the impact of gay-male identity on reported level of outness. (N=123)

| Variable | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| Outness Overall | 2.410 | 1.469 | .156 | 1.641 | .103 |
| Outness to Family | .655 | .331 | .181* | 1.882 | .050 |
| Outness to Friends | .474 | .335 | .134 | 1.415 | .160 |
| Outness to Classmates | .473 | .377 | .121 | 1.254 | .212 |
| Outness to Faculty/Staff/ Administrators | .505 | .379 | .130 | 1.331 | 1.186 |

**p < .05*

As is indicated in Table 5 (Regression for Lesbian Outness), students who identified as a lesbian were more likely to indicate higher levels of outness overall, as well as in the sub-measures of outness to family members and outness to friends. The most significant measure was outness to family members which was indicated a higher degree of significance. Gay men (Table 6: Regression for Gay-male Outness), however, revealed only one positive relationship between their identity and their outness to their families. These relationships were only present when bisexual identities were excluded from the regression. The regression, then, included the entire sample size, except for those who identified their sexual orientation as bisexual. There were no statistically significant relationships between outness (and its sub-measures) and identifying with another sexual orientation. In consideration of the results above, the null hypothesis was rejected but only for lesbians, gay men, and transgender identified participants.

The analysis of the second research question suggests that students who are involved in the LGBT Resource Center have higher self-reported levels of overall outness, and that there is a positive correlation between outness and the frequency of participation in the LGBT Resource Center. Additionally, the analysis revealed that transgender, lesbian, and gay male students had varying levels of overall outness. The most surprising affect that was measured was the inverse relationship between GPA and students who concealed their identity to avoid discrimination (Question 12).

Research Question 3: Campus Climate and Engagement

The third research question sought to determine if the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people impacted students' involvement in the LGBT Resource Center. Perceived campus climate was measured by an average score (and individual score) of survey items

Questions 36-40. Questions 36-39 asked participants to rate, on a Likert scale, the likelihood that LGBT identities would experience harassment, and Question 40 asked participants to rate to what degree they would associate themselves with an LGBT oriented space. As is substantiated below, there were no statistically significant findings for this research question. Table 7 reveals the results for Hypothesis 3.1, Hypothesis 3.3 and Hypothesis 3.4. Table 8 reveals the analysis for Hypothesis 3.2.

Table 7

Regression Campus Climate

Summary of the multiple regressions analysis for the impact of campus climate on various outcomes (H3.1; H3.3; H3.4).

| Variable | (N) | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|--|-----|-------|------|---------|-------|------|
| Involvement in the LGBT Resource Center (H3.1) | 123 | .423 | .654 | .059 | .647 | .519 |
| Intent to Return to the University (H3.3) | 118 | -.032 | .043 | -.069 | -.743 | .459 |
| GPA (H3.4) | 123 | .020 | .068 | .026 | .292 | .771 |

**p < .05*

Table 8

Regression for LGBTQ Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

Summary of the multiple regressions analysis for the impact of involvement with LGBTQ faculty, staff and administrators on perceived campus climate various outcomes (H3.2).

| Variable | (N) | B | SE B | β | t | p |
|---|-----|------|------|---------|-------|------|
| Overall Involvement with LGBTQ Faculty | 48 | .094 | .111 | .123 | .847 | .401 |
| Overall Involvement with LGBTQ Staff | 46 | .115 | .097 | .173 | 1.179 | .245 |
| Overall Involvement with LGBTQ Administrators | 15 | .132 | .145 | .236 | .907 | .379 |

**p < .05*

Hypothesis 3.1. A simple regressions analysis was employed to test the first hypothesis of the third research question: the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on a student's engagement with the LGBT Resource Center. Perceived campus climate was measured by an average score (and individual score) of survey items Questions 36-40. Involvement was, again, measured by the aggregate score of Questions 42, 43, and 47. The mean score for overall campus climate was $\bar{x} = 2.90$, and these scores were filled in for five participants who did not answer the question to effectively employ the regression analysis. Similarly, the mean score of involvement was $\bar{x} = 3.00$ and this score was filled in for six participants. Results of this regression analysis (Table 7) revealed that campus climate did not have a statistically significant impact on an LGBTQ student's involvement in the LGBT Resource Center. The null hypotheses was not rejected because there was no statistically significant relationship between perceived campus climate and involvement in the LGBT Resource Center.

Hypothesis 3.2. T-tests and a multiple regressions analysis was employed to test the relationship of the second hypothesis for the third research question: a student's involvement with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and/or administrators will have no impact her/his/their perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people. Perceived campus climate was measured by an average score (and individual score) of survey items Questions 36-40. To employ the regression analysis the mean score for campus climate ($\bar{x} = 2.90$) was filled in for five participants. Involvement with LGBTQ faculty, staff and administrators were measured two ways – first by asking if the respondent has had an interaction with these actors (Questions 13, 19 and 25) and second to rate the quality of those interactions on Likert scales (Questions 14-18, Questions 20-24, and Questions 26-30). The results (Table 8) of the t-tests and the multiple regressions analysis yielded no statistically significant relationships between the variables or predictors. For this reason, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Hypothesis 3.3. A two-tailed correlations test and multiple regressions analysis was used to determine if a relationship existed between the variable for the third hypothesis of the third research question: the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on the student's intent to return (retention). Campus climate was, again, measured by the average and individual measures of Questions 36-40. To employ the regression analysis the mean score for campus climate ($\bar{x} = 2.90$) was filled in for five participants. Intent to return to the university was measured by Question 35. Both the correlations test and the regressions analysis revealed no significant relationship (Table 7) between intent to return and the student's opinion of the campus climate. The null hypothesis was not rejected because there was no statistically

significant relationship between the participants' perceived campus climate and their intent to return to the university.

Hypothesis 3.4. A correlations test and a simple regressions analysis was used to test the relationship between the variables of the fourth hypothesis of the third research question: The perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people will have no impact on the student's GPA. Campus climate was, again, measured by the aggregate (and individual measures) of Questions 36-40. To employ the regression analysis the mean score for campus climate ($\bar{x} = 2.90$) was filled in for five participants. GPA was measured as a continuous variable (Question 32) and the mean score ($\bar{x} = 3.38$) was filled in for seven participants. Both the correlations tests and the regressions analysis revealed no significant relationship (Table 7) between campus climate and a student's GPA, therefore the null hypothesis was not rejected.

The final research question was an investigation of the impact that campus climate has on students' participation in the LGBT Resource Center. Relationships were tested between: the perceived campus climate and involvement in the LGBT Resource Center; the perceived campus climate and a students' interactions with LGBTQ faculty staff; the perceived campus climate and students' intent to return to the university; and the perceived campus climate and students' GPAs. Testing the third research question yielded no correlations or relationships between the variables or predictors.

Summary

The first research question and its corresponding hypotheses tested to determine if the academic success of LGBT students was influenced by their engagement with the LGBT Resource Center. The first hypothesis revealed no significant relationship between attending the

LGBT Resource Center and GPA, but it surprisingly showed that the GPAs of students who had more reasons for attending the LGBT Resource Center were slightly negatively impacted. The researcher also found a significant impact of students who selected a non-fixed sexual orientation identity (used the open-ended response) on their overall involvement in the LGBT Resource Center.

For this same research question, the researcher found no effect between involvement/engagement with the LGBT Resource Center and retention, as well as found inconsistent relationships between reason's for visiting the LGBT Resource Center and GPA. The latter hypothesis (R_1H_4) found differing effect sizes depending on the type of regression that was employed which revealed the inconsistency. Possible explanations for these phenomena (and those that were previously mentioned) are discussed at greater length in the discussion and conclusions section of Chapter V.

The second research question sought to determine whether a student's outness impacted his/her/their involvement in the LGBT Resource Center. This research question, and its corresponding hypotheses revealed several statistically significant relationships. The first hypothesis, when tested, showed that involvement significantly impacted overall outness as well as the sub-measures of outness to family, classmates, and faculty/staff/administrators. The second hypothesis also showed, not surprisingly, that overall outness has a statistically significant impact on the frequency of visits to the LGBT Resource Center. Although there was no statistically significant impact of overall outness on an LGBTQ student's GPA, one sub-measure analysis did surprisingly reveal that students who hid their LGBTQ identity indicated having slightly higher GPAs. In looking at the impact of gender identity and sexual orientation

on outness, the analyses revealed that gender identity impacted outness, but only for trans-identified students.

The final research question and hypotheses questions how the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ people might predict an LGBTQ student's involvement or engagement with the LGBT Resource Center. The analyses for these hypotheses tested the impact of campus climate on involvement in the LGBT Resource Center; the impact of relationships with LGBTQ faculty/staff/administrators on campus climate; the impact of perceived campus climate on retention; and the impact of perceived campus climate on an LGBTQ student's GPA. For each of these analyses, the researcher found no significant effects between any of the predictors.

As was mentioned in Chapter II, the researcher expected to find that involvement on campus would positively impact a student; that a positive campus climate would positively impact students; and that involvement in the LGBT Resource Center would have a positive impact on the overall success of LGBTQ students who are involved in these spaces. Although several analyses revealed results consistent with this expectation, several did not. Chapter V will unpack possible explanations for these phenomena.

Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine if LGBTQ resource centers, programming and services, had an impact on the academic success and engagement of LGBTQ students in college. The first chapter outlined the thrust of the study, the research questions and hypotheses and revealed the unique challenges that this type of study faces. The second chapter highlighted the role of LGBTQ resource centers, student identity development theory, LGBT identity development theory, queer theory, intersectional theory, and research with LGBTQ populations. The third chapter expounded the methodology for this study, including the development of the e-survey, and its dissemination tactic. The fourth chapter revealed the results through reporting descriptive frequencies as well as the complex tests that were used to test the hypotheses. The synthesis of the data explained the results that were expected, and unpacked the complex nature of the results that were unexpected.

The results of this study were that the GPAs of students who had more reasons for attending the LGBT Resource were slightly negatively impacted, students who were more involved had higher self-identified outness characteristics, and students who were more out visited the resource center more frequently. Additionally, the results revealed a relationship between students who indicated that they hid their sexual orientation to avoid discrimination with higher GPAs. In the remaining sections, I provide possible explanations for the results, and provide a narrative for the limitations that occurred during the study. Below, I share the impact of the study and will offer suggestions for future theory, practice, and research.

Discussion

The first and second research hypotheses did not reveal a statistically significant impact of students' involvement in the LGBT Resource Center on their GPAs or intent to return to the university, but did suggest that a student's GPA is negatively impacted by having more reasons for visiting the LGBT Resource Center. The latter result was surprising in light of student development theory (Astin, 1985; Kuh, 2009) which suggests that students who are more involved are more likely to be successful and persist through graduation, than those who are not involved or engaged by their institution.

Possible explanations for these results could be that the questions which ask about involvement in the LGBT Resource Center were not comprehensive enough to capture the depth and breadth of involvement and engagement in the LGBT Resource Center. Similarly, this study was a snapshot of a student's current experience and opinion of their involvement and success at the university. The results may have been different if objective measures could capture a student's actual GPA and retention between semesters or years, as well as an objective measure of their involvement in the LGBT Resource Center (such as tracking attendance by participant). A similar methodology could be employed to determine if the LGBT Resource Center had a mechanism to track the student's utilization of the resources within the LGBT Resource Center. This would help to clear the inconsistencies that were revealed when analyzing the impact of resource utilization on the student's GPA (R_1H_4).

However, an effect was measured: an inverse relationship existed between the number of reasons a student had for visiting the LGBT Resource Center and their GPAs. Thus, it is important to unpack possible explanations for why this could be true. One explanation is that

students may be seeking support at the LGBT Resource Center because of their negative experiences and performances (socially and/or academically). If this explanation is true, a longitudinal study that tracks students who are involved in the LGBT Resource Center over several semesters might show the effect of low-performing LGBTQ students and if their level of involvement impacts their academic performance over time. Additionally, a more accurate measure of retention or LGBTQ students could be measured in a longitudinal study, without having to institutionally measure a student's sexual orientation.

The third hypothesis for the first research question did reveal that students who identified with a non-normative sexual orientation (e.g., those who wrote-in their sexual orientation) were more likely to be involved with the LGBT Resource Center. This suggests that student's whose sexual orientation (but not gender identity) is less common will utilize the LGBT Resource Center more than the fixed identities (e.g., heterosexual, gay, bisexual, and lesbian) that were included in this survey. I believe that this finding is consistent with the practical experience of working in an LGBT Resource Center. However, I expected to find a similar result for less common gender-non-conforming identities. One reason that this effect was not revealed may be that the analysis employed, or the questions asked, are not advanced enough to reveal the impact of the sexual orientation and gender identity of students who have a non-heterosexual sexual orientation and a non-cis-gender gender identity, on their overall involvement in the LGBT Resource Center. Additionally, there were smaller response rates of gender-non-conforming/transgender identities than there were for "other" sexual orientations. If possible, a larger sample of both identity categories might reveal whether or not an effect truly exists between more marginalized identities and involvement in an LGBTQ resource center.

The second research question attempted to address the impact of outness about an LGBTQ identity on an LGBTQ student's involvement in the LGBT Resource Center. For these analyses, I was not surprised to find that involvement and engagement by the LGBT Resource Center impacted the overall outness (as well as several sub-measures for outness: family, friends, classmate, and professors) of LGBTQ students. The challenge, however, is that regression analyses suggest a causal relationship in their reporting, and one cannot say that outness caused the involvement, or that involvement caused outness. Rather, it is far more important to report that there is a relationship between the two. It is far more likely that outness impacts involvement, rather than involvement impacting outness. Logically speaking, one can imagine that those who are out are looking for identity based services and that it might be difficult for those who aren't out to be involved in an 'out' space. This is merely speculation, and an advanced study which considers both of these predictors would need to be conducted in order to determine if there truly is a causal relationship. Again, it is far more important to show that there is a relationship rather than making a statement about one predictor causing the other - thus is the case for many social science relationships.

One of those controls was revealed through R^2H_4 , which suggested that not all LGBTQ identities have similar rates of outness; in fact, it was those with a transgender or gender-non-conforming identity who reported the highest levels of outness. This control could suggest, in future research, that large samples of each identity would be needed in order to more accurately estimate how these identities experience success and retention in higher education. Nonetheless, the results of these analyses suggest that additional surveying could be conducted that might

more firmly ground the idea that outness impacts the frequency of participation in an LGBT Resource Center.

The greatest surprise of this entire study came from the analysis of R₂H₃, which showed that students who concealed their LGBTQ identity had slightly higher GPAs than those who did not conceal their identity. I expected the opposite analysis, which calls to question: what caused this effect? Some possible explanations for this phenomenon could include a low sample size, or that the question was poorly written and/or misunderstood by participants. Similarly, this result (and any other) could be consequence of false correlations. It is important to note that the effect size was not large because the effect only accounted for 3.4% of the variance in responses. One way to determine the validity of this measure would be to measure these same variables again, and also measure the identity concealing question with different phrases and measurements. An example of a rephrase might be: If people knew about my sexual orientation or gender identity, I would experience discrimination.

Assuming that the correlation and impact is correct, there are many possible explanations that affirm this effect. One possible explanation is that students may hide their LGBTQ identity in order to avoid discrimination, and because they do not experience discrimination they are better able to focus on completing their degrees at the university. This is, however, antithetical to mainstream queer theory and studies on minority students which have concluded that LGBTQ individuals who are discriminated against, or who are forced to hide their identity, have less success parameters in general, including academic performance and GPA (McLaughlin, 2017). To test this variable the multiple questions about discrimination and concealing identities (like the previously suggested question) could be asked to more clearly measure this experience.

Additionally, this is another effect that would be better explained by a qualitative narrative, where the researcher can ask student-participants to explain their reason for hiding their gender identity and to ask questions about how concealing their identity impacts other areas of their life (including performance in school, involvement on campus, and success elsewhere).

The third research question and resulting analyses explored the impact of the perceived campus climate on the involvement and engagement of LGBTQ students in the LGBT Resource Center. The first hypothesis (R_3H_1) addressed the research question fully by testing for the impact of campus climate on involvement in the LGBT Resource Center. For this effect, the researcher was unable to reject the null hypothesis. This could mean that LGBTQ students who are and are not involved in the LGBT Resource Center would maintain that level of involvement regardless of the campus climate. Additionally, in other measures of campus climate (Campus Pride, 2016) the presence of an LGBTQ resource center positively influences the opinion of the campus climate for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. Regardless of the students' involvement, this might suggest that knowledge of the center's existence might impact the campus climate, but, as this analysis suggests, the campus climate may not impact a student's involvement. Logically speaking, if the existence of an LGBTQ resource center positively impacts the campus climate for LGBTQ people, and there must be an LGBTQ resource center for students to be involved in it, then the option of being involved in an LGBTQ resource center is indicative of the campus climate. However, this is purely conjecture, and not grounded in any true research.

The descriptive statistics for this measure of campus climate resulted in a mean score of 2.90, where a score of 1.00-2.99 would suggest a negative campus climate, and a score of 3.01-5.00 would suggest a positive campus climate. The mean score of 2.90 suggests a slightly

negative campus climate. Additionally, less than half of the LGBTQ respondents indicated that they were not involved in the LGBTQ resource center. Although there is no correlation between these two numbers, it is interesting to consider what they might indicate. A future study which looks at the perceived campus climate for LGBTQ students and the number of students involved in an LGBTQ resource center might better answer this hypothesis.

The second hypothesis for the third research question tested revealed no statistically significant relationship between the students' perceived campus climate and their interpersonal relationship and experiences with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators. A more wholesome measure of this relationship could be employed to determine if engagement with faculty, staff, and administrators who are affirming of LGBTQ identities impacts the students' perception of campus climate. Additionally, a more direct question which asks if a student believes it is important to know or be engaged with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators. A final recommendation for measuring this hypothesis in the future would be to interview students about their experiences and values in working with LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators. Studying this relationship is important because it may shed light on the ways in which LGBTQ faculty, staff, and administrators can impact LGBTQ students. Questions about whether mentorship, identity validation and affirmation, or knowledge of a faculty, staff or administrators LGBTQ identity could help to eliminate the impact of those relationships on LGBTQ students.

Although there was no statistically significant relationship for R_3H_3 (the relationship between campus climate and retention) and R_3H_4 (the relationship between campus climate and GPA) further research which, again, can objectively measure the latter variables might better test

for these effects. This might be yet another opportunity to explore the narrative of the students' opinion of the campus climate and their intent to return to the university and/or GPA.

This discussion suggests that there are many opportunities to improve this study, but also several items to consider. Namely, whether these measures actually indicate a student's success factors as a result of being involved in the LGBT Resource Center. The most significant recommendation would be to conduct this study again in a more controlled fashion, to determine if the measured effects (and those that did not reveal an effect) actually exist.

Limitations

The most significant limitation was the data corruption that took place during the surveying stage of this study. The researcher worked with a campus statistics and surveying team to design and disseminate the survey, including the pilot phase of the study. The pilot was completed by 15 students in the LGBT Resource Center at SCSU, and there was no indication of the potential for a data contamination such as the that which took place during the actual surveying phase, as explained below.

The survey was sent to all students with an open link (e.g. anyone who had the link could take the survey). The researcher intended to leave the survey open for two weeks. However, within the first 48 hours, after assessing the state of the data pool, the researcher realized there was a critical point where data collection ceased (approximately 500 responses) and then a large influx of data was submitted overnight. At this point, the data had climbed from 500 to 728 overnight, on a weekend. Although the researcher was excited to see that students were eager to take the survey, the researcher saw this situation as perplexing and, thus, further investigated the data.

After looking through the open-ended responses for gender and sexual orientation, it was apparent that the data had been contaminated. More specifically, the data was polluted with responses from people who were outside of the university. The researcher and statistics team speculated that the open-link had been shared with a non-university forum or email listserv which may have had an anti-LGBT following. At this point, the researcher made the decision to close the survey portal and conduct several investigative analyses. The analysis revealed that, beginning with respondent number 501, the responses were not in good faith and included several pejoratives. A more in-depth analysis completed by a team of statisticians on campus revealed the critical point at which the respondent pool was contaminated, and that the breach was global (e.g., there were IP addresses that were located in the United Kingdom, Kazakhstan, and Australia, to name a few). This presented a halting point in the research process.

To move forward with the research, and with the help of his advisor and the team of statisticians, they employed a case-scenario analysis. The first scenario suggested that the researcher destroy all existing data and instead survey a random sample of 300 students. The second scenario was to scrap the existing data, re-send the survey to all students with a closed link, and use the resulting data for analysis. The third scenario was to identify the critical point in which the data pool was contaminated and indiscriminately destroy all data that occurred after the contamination point. This would mean that the researcher would be left with a survey response rate of 500, with an LGBTQ sample of $N=124$. The researcher rejected the first scenario because a random sample of 300 students would not likely yield enough LGBTQ students to run comparative analyses. In this scenario, the highest predicted number of LGBTQ people in a random sample of 300 students would be 30. Additionally, the researcher believed

that LGBTQ students who may be in this random sample may have taken the survey already and would not think to take it again.

The second scenario presented similar challenges. If the researcher scrapped all previously recorded responses, the likelihood that LGBTQ students would take the survey again was not high. The researcher believed that many LGBTQ students took the survey (the first time) when they saw the phrase LGBT in the recruitment email, and would not be enticed to take it again. Similarly, 500 students responded in good faith, and would still need to be eligible for the survey incentive. This suggested that re-surveying would cause the cost of surveying to double (e.g., the researcher would have had to incentivize both the contaminated pool and the new pool).

For the above reasons, the third scenario seemed to be the most plausible to the researcher, his advisor, and the statistics team. The major challenge was the subjective nature at which the critical contamination point was identified, and the imperative obligation to report the contamination and resulting invalidation of the survey. Although the data is useful, it is less generalizable because of the data contamination. The decision that was made was to keep the 500 good faith responses, so that the majority of LGBTQ students who responded would have their survey responses counted. However, the researcher believes that there is value to the results, which provide yet another foundation for future research and practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations that could be offered for this study. The first would be to resubmit the study to a more controlled atmosphere. As was explained in the limitations section of this chapter, the survey for this study was sent out to all students using an open-link provided through the university contracted survey program. Creating one-time-use hyperlinks

would correct this problem, or using a more sophisticated survey system which allows the survey-writer to input student email addresses. There are several methods to sampling this population in a more controlled way that could reduce the limitations, and provide more accurate results.

Additionally, a qualitative narrative that unpacks the experiences of students in an LGBTQ resource center could inform how and why this relationship exists. This might include interviews, focus groups, or an ethnographic study. A possible reason for this relationship is that students who feel comfortable about their LGBTQ identity may be seeking a community that is not only affirming and supportive of their identity, but also has involvement by others who think and feel similarly. Further, as LGBTQ identity theorists (Cass, 1984; Fassinger & Miller, 1996) have explained, the later stages in identity development involve a pride phase, whereby being LGBTQ is the most important part of the individual's life and they feel compelled to be involved in queer spaces and in a broader queer movement. This framework provides a narrative for why LGBTQ students are more involved if they have a greater measure of outness. A different study which quantitatively measures outness and LGBTQ identity stages could provide a more in-depth explanation for outness, involvement and LGBTQ identity development.

Although I did not explore the narrative of the students in the survey for this study, it did not prevent some students from reaching out to me to share with me their thoughts on the survey or why they answered some parts of the survey the way that they did. The emails from Bethany and Abigail (names changed to maintain confidentiality) help to explain two very different narratives on the opinion of campus climate. First, Bethany shared that she was a distance learner from Massachusetts who would utilize the services of the LGBT Resource Center if she lived in

St. Cloud. Her narrative that other distance learners may have responded to the campus climate questions, but may have made judgements based on what they know about campus, and not based on what they have actually experienced. To more accurately measure respondents, future research should measure whether or not students are distance learners. A possible question might be: Which of the following best describes your student status: (a) I live on campus, (b) I am a commuter student, (c) I am a distance/online student.

Alternatively, Abigail's narrative provides more of a statement about the actual campus climate and her opinion—suggesting that asking these questions is important to LGBTQ students who feel connected to their LGBTQ identity and its value on campus. Abigail stated:

I am 'generally out' to my classmates and professors, but I am not 'noticeably gay.'
Being so, I feel as if the LGBT resource center is a 'bit much,' for lack of better words. I am comfortable with my sexuality, which is why I don't go to the LGBT resource center. I feel as if it's more for students that are getting comfortable with being gay, or for students that are 'very' out, for lack of better words. I think it's really great for students looking for support, and it is a comfortable reminder for me knowing that there's something I could go if I needed something. But for students that aren't out, I believe going to a place labeled 'LGBT resource center' would be difficult. I believe I would participate in more events if they were in more casual settings. I believe it would be the same case for students that are questioning, aren't out, or aren't 'very' out.

This narrative provides a snapshot of one student's experience on campus. It details outness and an explanation for involvement, as well as the complex nature of her identity. As I remarked in the literature review, intersectionality plays a major role in discerning the impact of

identity characteristics (categorical variables) on measurable outcomes (ordinal/ratio variables). Specifically, intersectionality challenges the researcher (and reader) to consider several identity or structural characteristics in determining how systems (and systems of oppression) impact the individual or the structure/system at large. To that end, more research about the LGBTQ community will need to be developed to determine actual relationships and measurable outcomes for the experiences of queer people and how those experiences impact outness. This sentiment is similar for R_2H_2 . Although the impact of outness on the frequency of visits is statistically significant, the relationship might also be explained by some other trivial variable such as proximity to food. A great deal of control for the variables has to be employed to determine the actual relationship between these predictors.

To further explore this phenomenon, it would be advantageous to conduct interviews with students who are not out to determine what their academic success and engagement is like, as well as record their GPA. As was previously mentioned it would also be beneficial to take objective measures of some of these items to more accurately report these findings. The challenge to objectivity is informed by Johnson et al. (2013), who argued that determining outcomes for LGBTQ students is difficult because colleges and universities do not collect demographic information on the sexual orientation and gender identity of incoming students. Although this study implored micro-level social justice initiatives by naming names, it also calls for a systematic change to the systems that collect information about new students. Further the researcher challenges higher education administrators to more carefully consider the potentially positive impact of asking questions about gender identity and sexual orientation on admission

applications. Although the results were unexpected, I look forward to doing a more comprehensive investigation about why and how these results came to fruition.

Research Reflection

This thesis was completed to work towards completing my coursework to earn the Master of Science degree in High Education Administration at St. Cloud State University. Not only has it helped me to achieve my goal of earning a Master's degree, but it was my first experience completing an exploratory research project. Throughout my undergraduate and graduate schooling, many faculty members expressed the difficulty that a researcher has when trying to do research with invisible minorities, especially the LGBTQ community. This research project, to me, has proved to be a practical example of the challenges that researchers face when doing this work. Such challenges include research with an invisible minority, unexpected hurdles, and disappointing findings. However, rather than being discouraged by the limitations or some of the conflicting analyses, I am inspired to continue doing this work to learn and document the outcomes and experiences for the LGBTQ community – my community.

Finally, I am beyond grateful for this experience because it inspired me to pursue a PhD in Sociology where I will have the opportunity to study (in great depth) educational sociology and the experiences of LGBTQ students in college. When I applied for PhD programs, I was specifically guided by a major point that was developed in this paper: colleges and universities do not (usually) ask questions about gender identity and sexual orientation in their admissions documents – I hope to change that, by conducting further research and analyses that can help to shape the future of admissions processes as it pertains to queer students. The results of this study suggest that students experience *something* as a part of their participation in LGBTQ resource

center, but further research and analyses are necessary to determine what that *something* is and how it actually impacts LGBTQ students.

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Appendix: Survey

Background Information

1. What is your gender identity?
 - Woman
 - Man
 - Transgender
 - Another Gender Identity: _____

2. What is your sexual orientation?
 - Bisexual
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Heterosexual
 - Another Sexual Orientation: _____

3. To whom are you most attracted?
 - Women
 - Men
 - Both Men and Women
 - Uncertain

4. Are you a full time or part-time student?
 - Full-time
 - Part-time

5. With what racial/ethnic groups do you identify? (If you are if a multi-racial/multi-ethnic background, mark all that apply.)
 - African American/Black
 - Asian/Pacific Islander
 - Middle Eastern
 - American Indian/Alaskan Native
 - Chicano/Latino/Hispanic
 - White/Caucasian

6. What is your citizenship status?
 - U.S. citizen—born in the United States
 - U.S. citizen—naturalized
 - Permanent resident (immigrant)
 - International student (F-1 Visa or J-1 Visa)

Outness and Campus Relationships

(Only the participants who indicated an LGBTQ identity in the demographics section will complete this section.)

In this section, please describe your level of “outness” in regard to the following categories of people, where 1 indicates that you are “out” to absolutely no one about your LGBTQ identity, and 5 means that you are totally out.

| | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. Family | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Classmates | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Professors/Faculty/Staff | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

11. On a scale of 1-5, where 1 is not important at all, and 5 is very important, how important is your LGBTQ identity to your overall identity?

| | | | | |
|------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|----------------|
| Very Unimportant | Unimportant | Neutral | Important | Very Important |
|------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|----------------|

12. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement: I conceal my sexual orientation/gender identity to avoid discrimination.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|

13. Are you aware of or connected with any LGBTQ faculty member(s) on campus?

- Yes
- No

(IF YES) Thinking about the LGBTQ faculty member(s) that you know on campus, how often have you done the following:

| | | | | |
|--|------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| 14. Talked about career plans | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 15. Worked with them on an activity other than coursework | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 16. Discussed course topics, ideas and concepts outside of class | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 17. Discussed your academic performance | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |

(IF YES) Thinking about the LGBTQ faculty member(s) that you know on campus, how would you rate the quality of your interactions where “1” is poor and “7” is excellent.

| | | | | | |
|-----|----------|---|---|---|---|
| 18. | 1 (Poor) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|----------|---|---|---|---|

19. Are you aware of or connected with any LGBTQ staff member(s) on campus?

- Yes
- No

(IF YES) Thinking about the LGBTQ staff member(s) that you know on campus, how often have you done the following:

| | | | | |
|--|------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| 20. Talked about career plans | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 21. Worked with them on an activity | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 22. Discussed course topics, ideas and concepts outside of class | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 23. Discussed your academic performance | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |

(IF YES) Thinking about the LGBTQ staff member(s) that you know on campus, how would you rate the quality of your interactions where “1” is poor and “7” is excellent.

| | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|---|---|---|------------------|
| 24. | 1 (Poor) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 (Excellent) |
|-----|-------------|---|---|---|------------------|

25. Are you aware of or connected with any LGBTQ administrators on campus?

- Yes
- No

(IF YES) Thinking about the LGBTQ administrator(s) that you know on campus, how often have you done the following:

| | | | | |
|--|------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| 26. Talked about career plans | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 27. Worked with them on an activity | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 28. Discussed course topics, ideas and concepts outside of class | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |
| 29. Discussed your academic performance | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Never |

(IF YES) Thinking about the LGBTQ administrator(s) that you know on campus, how would you rate the quality of your interactions where “1” is poor and “7” is excellent.

| | | | | | |
|-----|----------|---|---|---|---|
| 30. | 1 (Poor) | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-----|----------|---|---|---|---|

Academic Achievement

31. What degree are you currently working towards?

- Associate’s Degree
- Bachelor’s Degree
- Master’s Degree
- Doctoral Degree

32. What is your cumulative academic grade point average (GPA)?

- _____
 - i. fill in the blank (hint: must choose a number between 0.00 and 4.00; must include all three digit places)

33. How many semesters of college have you completed at St. Cloud State University?

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7-8
- 9+

34. Approximately how many college credits have you completed?

- 1-30
- 31-59
- 60-89
- 90-119
- 120+

35. When thinking about your time at St. Cloud State University, which of the following is most true for you:

- I am planning to graduate
- I am thinking about dropping out of school
- I am definitely dropping out of school
- I am planning to transfer to another school before graduating

Campus Climate and Involvement

Considering your own thoughts and opinions, please indicate the likelihood that the following identities will experience harassment on campus due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, where “1” is very unlikely to be harassed and “5” indicates very likely to be harassed?

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 36. Bisexual Persons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. Gay Men | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. Lesbians | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. Transgender Persons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

40. Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following statement: I stay away from areas of campus where gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons congregate for fear of being labeled.

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|

41. Have you visited the LGBT Resource Center during this academic school year?
- Yes
 - No
42. How often do you visit the LGBT Resource Center?
- 3+ times per week
 - 1-2 times per week
 - 1-2 times per month
 - a few times per semester
 - I don't visit the LGBT Resource Center
43. If you have visited the LGBT Resource Center during this academic year, what was the purpose for your visit? (select all that apply)
- Social (Visiting friends/Community members)
 - Resource Access (Computer, books, movies, etc.)
 - Student Organization Meeting
 - Other meeting
 - Event
 - Other: _____
 - I don't visit the LGBT Resource Center
44. How often do you visit other student support offices (e.g. Multicultural Student Services, Women's Center, Veteran's Resource Center, American Indian Center, etc.)?
- 3+ times per week
 - 1-2 times per week
 - 1-2 per month
 - a few times per semester
 - I don't visit student support offices
45. If you have visited other student support offices during this academic year, what was the purpose for your visit? (select all that apply)
- Social (Visiting friends/Community members)
 - Resource Access (Computer, books, movies, etc.)
 - Student Organization Meeting
 - Other meeting
 - Event
 - Other: _____
 - I don't visit student support offices
46. Have you participated in any programming or events sponsored or co-sponsored by the LGBT Resource Center during this academic year?
- Yes
 - No
 - Not Sure

47. What events have you attended that were sponsored by the LGBT Resource Center or LGBT Student Organizations during this academic year? (Select all that apply)
- No Hate Speaker: Ryan Sallans
 - The Big Picture
 - LGBT Trivia Night
 - Trans Day of Remembrance Vigil
 - The Harvest Dinner
 - Fall Drag Show
 - I have not attended any events
48. Are you involved with an LGBTQ student organization (OUTLoud or Alliance)?
- Yes
 - No
49. (*If Yes 49*) On average, how often do you attend an LGBTQ student organization meeting (OUTLoud or Alliance)?
- One time per week
 - Two times per week
 - More than two times per week
 - One time per month
 - One time per semester
 - One time per academic year
 - I never attend an LGBTQ student organization meeting
50. Are you involved with a non-LGBTQ student organization?
- Yes
 - No
51. (*If Yes 51*) On average, how often do you attend a non-LGBTQ student organization?
- One per week
 - One time per week
 - Two times per week
 - More than two times per week
 - One time per month
 - One time per semester
 - One time per academic year
 - I never attend an LGBTQ student organization meeting