

Coming In and Coming Out: Navigating the Spaces between Cultural and Sexual Identity

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Abstract

The present study addresses three objectives: 1) to explore the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) persons who are *coming in* the United States as students and *coming out* about their sexual orientation, 2) to explore the cultural narratives that emerge in their disclosure process, and 3) to generate ways to support LGBQ international students. Research on the disclosure process for LGBQ persons have been comprised largely of white, middle-class individuals and families. This narrative inquiry broadens our understanding of how LGBQ persons from different cultures define and experience the coming-out process, particularly in the context of moving to a different country. Twelve LGBQ international students shared their coming in, coming out stories through interviews, journals, a timeline, online forum, and picture. Narrative analysis of their stories consisted of three methods: thematic, structural, and dialogic. These findings provide directions for future research, clinical practitioners, educators, and student affairs personnel working with international students.

Coming In and Coming Out: Navigating the Spaces between Cultural and Sexual Identity

Hoa N. Nguyen

General Audience Abstract

Imagine moving to a different culture. You arrive in a foreign land, where you are grouped into a racial category that represents many countries and cultures. You struggle to stay in contact with family and friends from your native country while trying to build connections and find support in your new home. On top of that, your sexual identity is non-heterosexual, and the social climate and level of acceptance toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) people in your new home is vastly different from your country-of-origin. This is a sliver of the experiences that LGBQ persons may face when moving to a different country. The present project explores the stories of LGBQ international students in the United States, in hopes of generating ways to support them. Twelve LGBQ international students shared their coming in, coming out stories. This broadens our understanding of how cultures shapes the coming-out process, particularly in the context of moving to a different country. These findings provide directions for future research, clinical practitioners, educators, and student affairs personnel working with international students.

Dedication

To the sojourners who generously shared their stories in this research, and to my family,
the courageous sojourners in my life who taught me perseverance, genuine kindness, and love.

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Mẹ yêu em thiết tha, hơn mùa xuân trong cuộc đời

Chờ nhìn con theo hoa hướng dương, tìm nắng soi

Cha yêu em thiết tha, mang gởi con cho tình người

Translation: *Mother loves me passionately, more than the spring of her life.*

Waiting to see her child find sunshine like the sunflower.

Father loves me deeply, entrusting his child to the kindness of humanity.

Last but not least, thank you, mom and dad. Thank you for instilling in me the values of love, honor, and compassion. Despite the struggles of war, immigration, and diaspora, you have given me everything you were able to give. You always did your best, it was extraordinary, and I love you so much.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
General Audience Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Background and Significance	2
Growth of International Students	2
Global LGBTQ Issues	3
Disclosing Sexual Orientation	5
Statement of the Problem	6
Purpose and Research Questions	6
Scope of the Study	7
Definition of Terms	8
Chapter 2: Literature Review	11
International Students in the United States	11
Psychosocial Health of International Students	13
Financial and Academic Pressures	14
Systems of Support	16
Language and Culture	20
Acculturation and Culture Shock	21
Racism and Discrimination	24
Gaps in the Literature	25

Cultural Identity Models	26
Sexual Identity Models	27
Multidimensional Identity Models.....	31
Systematic Review on LGBTQ International Students.....	34
Inclusion Criteria	35
Literature Search Strategy.....	35
Data Extraction	37
Data Synthesis.....	37
Theoretical Frameworks	41
Social Constructivism	41
Narrative Family Therapy.....	42
Intersectionality.....	44
Chapter 3: Methodology	46
Study Design.....	46
Research Paradigm.....	48
Researcher as Instrument	49
Sampling and Recruitment.....	50
Data Collection	51
Demographic Survey	52
First Interview	52
First Journal	53
Second Interview	53
Second Journal or Forum	54

Data Transcription and Storage	54
Data Analysis	55
Narrative Thematic Analysis	55
Narrative Structural Analysis.....	57
Narrative Dialogic Analysis.....	58
Coding Process.....	60
Constructing Narrative Accounts.....	61
Moving from Story to Story.....	61
Shared Narrative Meaning	62
Rigor and Trustworthiness.....	62
Triangulation.....	63
Researcher’s Training.....	63
Community Informants.....	64
Prolonged Engagement.....	64
Reflexivity.....	64
Audit Trail and Memos.....	65
Narrative Coherence	65
Sampling and Thick Description	66
Quality of the Study’s Significance	66
Rationale for Methodology.....	67
Limitations of Methodology	67
Ethical Considerations	68
Ethical Decision-Making Guide	69

Chapter 4: Findings.....	71
Participant Demographics.....	71
Narrative Accounts and Selected Subthemes	76
Auxy’s Story.....	77
Yu Chen’s Story.....	81
Ling’s Story	85
Huang’s Story	89
Jean Paul’s Story.....	95
Benjamin’s Story	101
Darla’s Story	105
Victor’s Story.....	110
Zang’s Story.....	114
Aditya’s Story.....	118
Isabella’s Story.....	122
Kenji’s Story	126
Shared Narrative of Implicit Contradiction between LGBQ and Family Identity.....	130
Shared Narrative Meaning: Sojourner’s Success.....	131
Cultivating Success in Relationship to Self and Others.....	133
Constructing New Stories of Success	136
Using Success as a Form of Resistance and Social Action	140
Engaging Needs that Gear the Sojourner towards Success	143
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications	145
Key Findings.....	145

Narrative Therapy	149
Intersectionality.....	150
Comparison to Previous Literature	150
Limitations	151
Future Research	153
Implications for Educators and Administrators	154
Implications for Clinical Practitioners	155
Lessons Learned.....	156
Conclusion	157
References.....	159
Appendix A.....	182
Appendix B	183
Appendix C	185
Initial Email	185
Social Media	186
Flyer	182
Appendix D.....	188
Appendix E	190
Pre-Interview Demographic Survey	190
First Interview Schedule	191
Second Interview Schedule.....	193
First Journal Prompt.....	194
Second Journal Prompt	194

Guidelines for Forum	195
Appendix F.....	196
Appendix G.....	197
Appendix H.....	204
Appendix I	206
Appendix J	208

Figures

Figure 1. Stages for sojourner adjustment (Oberg, 1960).....	24
Figure 2. Phases for sojourner adjustment (Adler, 1975).	24
Figure 3. Model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000).	32
Figure 4. Reconceptualized model (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).	33
Figure 5. PRISMA flow diagram.....	36
Figure 6. Timeline for study design.....	47
Figure 7. Five levels of research design.....	48
Figure 8. Three levels of analysis.	62
Figure 9. Jean Paul's picture.	98
Figure 10. Darla's picture.....	109
Figure 11. Victor's picture.	112
Figure 12. Yu Chen's picture.....	134
Figure 13. Kenji's picture.....	135
Figure 14. Huang's picture.....	137
Figure 15. Aditya's picture.	138
Figure 16. Ling's picture.....	139
Figure 17. Isabella's picture.	140

Tables

Table 1. Acculturation Strategies (Berry, 1997; 2003).....	22
Table 2. Models on Cultural and Sexual Identity Development (Herbert, 1995).....	30
Table 3. Systematic Review Sample.....	37
Table 4. Systematic Review Findings.....	38
Table 5. Summary of Analytic Approaches.....	55
Table 6. Narrative Thematic Coding Map	56
Table 7. Narrative Structural Coding Map	57
Table 8. Narrative Dialogic Coding Map	60
Table 9. Building Trustworthiness.....	63
Table 10. Demographics	71
Table 11. Student Status and Study in the United States.....	72
Table 12. Culture, Race, and Languages	73
Table 13. Family and Closeness	75
Table 14. Selected Subthemes from Auxe.....	80
Table 15. Selected Subthemes from Yu Chen	84
Table 16. Selected Subthemes from Ling.....	88
Table 17. Selected Subthemes from Huang.....	94
Table 18. Selected Subthemes from Jean Paul	100
Table 19. Selected Subthemes from Benjamin.....	104
Table 20. Selected Subthemes from Darla.....	109
Table 21. Selected Subthemes from Victor	113
Table 22. Selected Subthemes from Zang	117

Table 23. Selected Subthemes from Aditya.....	121
Table 24. Selected Subthemes from Isabella	125
Table 25. Selected Subthemes from Kenji.....	129
Table 26. Shared Narrative Meaning: Sojourner's Success.....	149

Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine moving to a different culture. You arrive in a foreign land, where you are grouped into a racial category that represents many countries and cultures. You struggle to stay in contact with family and friends from your native country while trying to build connections and find support in your new home. On top of that, your sexual identity is non-heterosexual, and the social climate and level of acceptance toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) people in your new home is vastly different from your country-of-origin. The language is different, not only in words and meaning, but also in structure of conversation and communication styles. Miles away from family and friends, how do you navigate the process of disclosing your sexual orientation? What are the risks and benefits of disclosing given the cultural and geographical boundaries between family, friends, and other supportive networks in your life?

This is a sliver of the experiences that LGBQ persons may face when moving to a different country. Given my interest in this intersection of cultural and sexual identity, the present project aims to explore the experiences and stories of LGBQ international students in the United States. The study objectives are:

- 1) To explore the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) persons who are *coming in* the United States as students and *coming out* about their sexual orientation,
- 2) To explore the cultural narratives that emerge in their disclosure process, and
- 3) To generate ways to support LGBQ international students.

This area of study is both timely and relevant, given the growing population of international students in the United States. Educators strive to achieve a culturally diverse student population and a global perspective in U.S. higher education (Obst & Forster, 2005). Many colleges and universities promote international learning experiences, aided by advanced

technology and ample modes of transportation for travel and immigration. The increase and ease of travel facilitate inevitable cultural exchange of values and belief systems. International learning experiences are reciprocal; ideally, both students from the home country and the host country learn from one another. This mutual learning relationship encourages cultural awareness and a shared creating of narratives about self and others. The use of the word *international* explains the relationship between the student and the host country they enter, rather than a mere demographic characteristic. *Sojourner* is also a term often used interchangeably with *foreign*, *international*, or *overseas* students. Emerging in the late 13th century, to sojourn means to visit or stay for a time, a phrase that captures the temporary and dynamic nature of this experience (Church, 1982). It is this experience and how it interplays with the decision-making process of disclosing sexual orientation as a LGBTQ-identified person that is the focus of this study.

Background and Significance

This study advances our understanding of *intersectionality*, the complex (and sometimes conflicting) relationships in a person's web of identities, privileges, and oppressions, as we navigate the dimensions of race, culture, gender, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and so forth (Cole, 2009; Syed, 2010). The following section on background and significance further describes why a study on the coming in, coming out narratives of LGBTQ international students is warranted.

Growth of International Students. The number of international students in the United States attained an all-time high in the academic year 2013/2014 (IIE, 2014e). Since the Open Doors initiative launched in 2000, there was a 72 percent increase in the number of international students (IIE, 2014a). Regarding the growth of international students in the United States, Evan M. Ryan, Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs stated, "Only by

engaging multiple perspectives within our societies can we all reap the numerous benefits of international education – increased global competence, self-awareness and resiliency, and the ability to compete in the 21st century economy” (IIE, 2014e).

There are several important benefits that international students offer to the United States. First, international students contribute more than \$27 billion to the U.S. economy in 2013 (IIE, 2014e). They are good for the learning environment in higher education, contributing diverse, multiple perspectives and increasing cultural awareness and appreciation (Bevis, 2002; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Interaction among members of different cultures can stimulate intercultural communication and understanding. Thus, it is important to consider the needs of international students and promote a positive learning experience during the duration of their studies abroad.

Since international students are more easily accessible than other migrating groups such as immigrants and refugees, there is an expansive literature on international students (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001), but few studies have investigated their sexual identity. LGBTQ international students are often overlooked. They may be hard to reach because of the global marginalization and stigma towards LGBTQ persons and the challenges associated with studying in a foreign country (e.g. lack of support and resources, racism, discrimination, language barriers, loneliness, isolation, and adjustment issues).

Global LGBTQ Issues. By studying the diverse perspectives of international students, we can access an opportunity to explore LGBTQ issues outside the United States. LGBTQ rights and acceptance is evolving globally, and the statuses, rights, and social acceptance of LGBTQ persons vary from country to country. For instance, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people can be charged with “debauchery”, “prostitution”, and “violating the teachings of religion” in Egypt, punishable up to 10 years in prison (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights,

and Labor, 2013c). In Saudi Arabia, it is illegal for men and women to behave like or wear clothing of the opposite sex, and consensual sexual activity with someone of the same sex is punishable by flogging or even death (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2013e). Countries like China and South Korea do not criminalize consensual same-sex activities between adults, but the lack of legal protection against hate crimes and workplace discrimination forces LGBT communities and organizers to keep a low profile (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2013b; 2013d).

Few countries provide adequate legal protection for discrimination against LGBT-motivated hate crimes. Though the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of legalized same-sex marriage in June 26, 2015, protection against discrimination, transgender rights, and hate crimes are among many other issues relevant to the LGBT community. Canada has legalized same-sex marriage, and the law prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation; the Northwest Territories, Ontario, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and expression (Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2013a). Canada reported a ten percent increase of sexual orientation-related hate crimes in 2011, motivating some police forces to hire LGBT liaison officers and develop public awareness campaigns with the help of community organizations.

In 2011, the United Nation's (U.N.) Human Rights Council established the stance, "LGBT rights are human rights" (Chaffee & Thompson, 2011). This is the first time the U.N. has taken a critical, direct step towards addressing LGBT human rights. The United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) then outlined the patterns of human rights (by country), demanding a response to the criminalization, discrimination in work, healthcare, and education, and the hate-motivated torture, violence, and killing of LGBT people

(U.N. OHCHR, 2011). According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA, 2013), LGBT persons face imprisonment in 78 countries and the death penalty in 5 countries.

Some of the worse LGBT policies occur in African and Middle Eastern countries where discrimination is not only unregulated, but institutionalized (ILGA, 2013). However, there are vast differences across countries in any region. For example, legal policies on LGBT human rights are different in India versus Nepal, Iran versus Turkey, and neighboring countries may have considerably diverse perspectives on LGBT issues. It is critical to minimize painting any cultures or countries with too broad a brush. All in all, no leaders from any one country can say they have truly achieved equality and protection against victimization for LGBT people. We often view global cultural differences as existing in a binary divide between the Western world's growing acceptance and the close-mindedness of Eastern society toward LGBQ rights, but around the world, attitudes toward LGBQ issues exist on a spectrum. Patterns of cultural values, religion, and historical context can explain the level of acceptance and attitudes toward non-heterosexual identities. These patterns influence the cultural narratives about LGBQ persons.

Disclosing Sexual Orientation. Exploring the disclosure process is one window into understanding cultural narratives about LGBQ persons. The disclosure process may be influenced by the contrast between the international student's home and host country, in regards to cultural values, religion, and historical context (Herbert, 1995). Yet, little is understood about the influence of moving to a different country and coming out. In the United States, disclosing sexual orientation is considered a critical part of sexual identity development (Green, 2000). It may be used as a marker of successful and healthy identity development, increased authenticity, and sense of self (deMonteflores & Schultz, 1978; Rhoads, 1995).

Coming out can also be considered a sign of differentiation, the ability to recognize realistic and inevitable dependence on others while making decisions that reflect the individual's thoughtful assessment of choices (LaSala, 2000). A poorly differentiated self may make decisions based on emotionality and relational pressures. Coming out can prevent other psychosocial problems such as low self-esteem, isolation, depression, and suicide (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 1996; Rhoads, 1994). In that sense, expressing sexual identity buffers mental health risks. However, this framework of coming out and sexual identity development primarily reflects a US-centric paradigm.

Statement of the Problem

International students who identify as LGBTQ weave another thread of identity in the intricate blanket of belongingness. Some may feel that disclosing their sexual identity risks losing membership in their cultural group, forcing them to choose between their cultural and sexual identity (Tang, 2007). Encouraging a *both-and* perspective can be exceptionally difficult when facing deeply ingrained cultural narratives, institutionalized discrimination, and the criminalization of LGBTQ persons. The literature on coming out has also focused mostly on disclosure on parent-child relationships, with little research on extended family members (e.g. aunts, siblings), friends, coworkers, and families of choice. Depending on the culture, the definition of "family" may be different. Family communication and structure may look differently. Thus, the focus on the disclosure process for international students needs to be situated in their cultural context and the way they conceptualize family.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the cultural narratives and disclosure experiences of LGBTQ international students. The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the experiences of LGBTQ international students *coming in* the United States and *coming out* about sexual orientation?
2. What cultural narratives were salient in their disclosure process?
3. What are ways to support their needs?

Scope of the Study

For the purposes of this study, I did not limit the race and ethnicity of the sample because of the focus on the process of disclosing sexual identity when moving to a different country and not on a particular ethnic or cultural group. Therefore, the study was limited in understanding how specific racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds interact with sexual identity. Not to mention, country-of-origin, religion, and historical context were other factors not fully addressed in this study that may have shaped the process of disclosing sexual identity. This study focused on international students in the US and did not extend to the experiences of immigrants, refugees, and other sojourners in the United States.

To avoid conflating sexual and gender identity, I focused on sexual orientation in this project. The disclosure process and stories of trans-identified international students merit a study of its own in order to fully address the complexities of gender, culture, and trans-identity. As a qualitative project, the results were not intended to be statistically generalizable, though patterns and processes may be transferable. I acknowledge the risk of treating LGBTQ international students as a monolithic group and propose that a narrative inquiry approach helped minimize generalizations and stereotypes, by taking a fuller, holistic view of their experiences.

Understanding the compounding effects of discrimination as a LGBTQ person and an international student is complex. How might coming out be different for international students from different countries, cultures, and subcultures? It may be more accurate to describe their

process as *coming in*, which focuses less on disclosing sexual identity to others and more on the process of disclosing to oneself and finding peace with that identity (A. Singh, personal communication, June, 6, 2014). Other scholars have suggested *inviting in* as a better suited term to describe this process (E. Grafsky, personal communication, May 13, 2015). Careful consideration regarding the language used in this study aims to prevent privileging a US-centric model of disclosing sexual identity.

Definition of Terms

The following list establishes a common understanding of terms used in this dissertation.

Assimilation. A one-directional way to describe the migration process, in which sojourners are expected to adopt the culture of their host country and lay aside values and beliefs from their home country.

Acculturation. A bi-dimensional way to describe the dual process between sojourners and their host country that consists of mutual learning and influence.

Acculturative Stress. A distinct form of stress that sojourners encounter in the acculturation process, often from life changes that occur in the migration process, cross-cultural differences, and other manifestations.

Country / Culture of Origin. The original country or culture a person grows up with, often used to refer to the place from which an international student arrives.

Cultural Narratives. Narratives that emerge from sociocultural discourses about identities and relationships.

Family of Choice. A concept that transforms the language and construct of family by including non-biological family relationships formed based on values of closeness, openness, choice, fluidity, and support.

Family of Origin. The family a person grows up with, usually through biological ties.

Identity Gaps. Identity gaps refer to the incongruence between how people perceive their identity versus how others perceive them.

Intersectionality. A concept from critical theorist, Kimberle Crenshaw, which describes how race, culture, gender, and class interacts to construct a complex interplay between systems of privilege and oppression, domination and subjugation. The concept highlights how individuals and communities that land in between intersections of marginalized identities fall through the cracks.

Narrative. A way of telling and knowing about human life experiences. Narratives make up a story. In narrative therapy, narrative, in essence, is a metaphor for life experiences.

Narrative Analysis. Analytic method that examines storyteller's narratives from a holistic approach, sustains the wholeness of their story, and maintains the richness of their life experiences. Narrative analysts are not finding narratives; they are active participants in the co-creation of narratives.

Narrative Coherence. How much the narratives makes sense in context and the overall unity of the story. Qualitative researchers seek coherence in their data, though narrative inquirers embrace unsuccessful efforts toward coherence.

Narrative Family Therapy. A therapeutic model developed by White and Epston (1990) that uses the narrative metaphor to discuss how family members organize and construct stories about themselves and experiences.

Narrative Inquiry. A methodology that explores a storyteller's narratives of their life experiences.

Place. One of three commonplaces of narrative inquiry that emphasize how people and stories are intimately linked and situated in a particular place.

Polyphony. Concept that invites and embraces multiple voices and interpretations to engage the multiplicities of identity and life experiences.

Reflexivity. Critical reflection on how the subjectivity, social locations, and privileges of the researcher will shape the research process, findings, and analysis.

Sociality. One of three commonplaces of narrative inquiry that emphasize the personal and social conditions of stories, as shaped by cultural, institutional, and familial narratives.

Sojourners. Students studying in a different country, also referred to as international, foreign, or overseas students. “Foreign” has been regarded as derogatory; “international” too broad (Eland, 2001).

Story. Detailed organization of events, characters, context, and plot that forms a fuller description of a person’s life experiences. A story consists of narratives.

Temporality. One of three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, that emphasize the temporal dimension as embodied in the person living and telling their stories.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this review, I discuss current literature on the experiences of international students, in particular those who identify as LGBTQ. I also review various cultural and sexual identity models. Scholars use sojourners, international, foreign, and overseas students, all to describe this target population. The following literature search includes published works that use any of these terms. Building on previous research, I highlight gaps in this area of study and emphasize how the proposed study can contribute to a more culturally sensitive understanding of sexual identity and the disclosure process. I conclude the review by presenting the theoretical frameworks that guide my study.

International Students in the United States

Each year, the Institute of International Education (IIE) publishes its Open Doors Report, an initiative formed in partnership with the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State (IIE, 2014e). This annual report tracks important trends in study abroad experiences and provides a comprehensive resource on the state of international educational exchanges between the United States and other countries. The most recent Open Doors report found an eight percent (66,408 students) increase of international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in the 2013/14 academic year compared to the previous year (IIE, 2014a). This amounted to a total of 886,052 international students, a record high that continues to establish the United States as a top choice for foreign studies. Approximately four percent of all undergraduate and graduate students were international students (IIE, 2014e).

International students in the United States originated from more than 220 countries (IIE, 2014b). However, a disproportionate influx of students arrived from China and Saudi Arabia, contributing a 73 percent growth in this population (IIE, 2014g). India, Brazil, Iran, and Kuwait

represented an additional 18 percent of the growth (IIE, 2014g). The Middle East and North Africa were the regions with the fastest growing number of overseas student in 2013/14. One explanation for this growth is increased investment and scholarship availability provided by the governments in these countries.

Together, China, India, and South Korea contributed 50 percent to the total enrollment, although the number of students from South Korea is actually declining while the number of students from India is increasing, mostly at the graduate level (IIE, 2014c). Students from Saudi Arabia accounted for six percent of the total population of international student, and students from China accounted for 31 percent, mostly at the undergraduate level (IIE, 2014c). The remaining places of origin account for less than 5 percent. Despite the diversity in countries-of-origin, a disproportionate ratio of students originate from China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia. None of these countries provide legal recognition of same-sex marriage or protection against discrimination and victimization of LGBT people. In Saudi Arabia, there is a death penalty for consensual same-sex sexual activity. India awaits the court ruling on its current law which prosecutes gay and lesbian people. LGBT issues appear invisible in China and South Korea where there are no specific legislation for the treatment and protection of LGBT people.

There are more international students enrolled in the United States than any other country (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Upon entry, international students tend to cluster in particular areas and universities. In 2014, the top universities were New York University, University of Southern California, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Columbia University, and Purdue University (IIE, 2014f). California, New York, Texas, Massachusetts, and Illinois were the top five states hosting international students (IIE, 2014e). New York City hosted the highest concentration of international students. Most international students live in large, metropolitan

areas, but students increasingly attend community colleges in smaller U.S. cities to manage increasing tuition costs (Obst & Forster, 2005).

Programs for international students are a part of an initiative called *internationalization*, which is defined as “the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global environment” (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291). The objectives of internationalization are to advance multicultural learning, build cross-cultural knowledge, and improve language acquisition. Students study abroad to receive better education and diverse, professional experiences in the United States. While the scholars acknowledge the benefits of internationalization, they also discuss the reality and challenges of studying in a foreign country. For instance, scholars note how international students may be vulnerable when their host university uses internationalization to financially exploit them while providing inadequate and dissatisfying educational experiences (Altbach & Teichler, 2001).

Psychosocial Health of International Students

Researchers studying the psychosocial wellbeing of international students described a multitude of challenges including financial problems, academic pressures, language barriers, culture shock, inadequate support, limited social skills, depression, isolation, loneliness, homesickness, racial discrimination, exclusion, and alienation from the U.S. culture (Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010; Yeh & Inose, 2003). International students are especially vulnerable to depressive symptoms because of the stress from adjusting to the host culture and negative interactions with members of the host culture (Spencer-Oatery & Xiong, 2006). Social integration, family-related stress, homesickness, loneliness, isolation, academic difficulties, financial crisis, and depression are issues commonly found among international students (Chen, 1996; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992;

Parr et al., 1992). International students are at higher risk than American students for psychological distress (Mori; 2000; Padilla et al., 1986; Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Psychological distress may be a more broad way to describe acculturative stress, and these two concepts tend to overlap in the literature on student sojourners and their adjustment in the host country.

Financial and Academic Pressures. Though international students assumedly have the financial backing to study abroad, financial problems may be a source of stress for some of them. In 2014, most international students (64.7%) were able to pay for their education out of pocket, usually through family funds (IIE, 2014). However, a substantial portion (19.3%) were funded by the U.S. institution they attend (IIE, 2014). The government or university from their country of origin funded 7.5 percent, and current employers funded 5.6 percent of international students (IIE, 2014). Overseas students may be worried about funding as U.S. tuition costs rise, especially when their ability to stay enrolled is highly dependent on the availability of assistantship and sponsorship (Obst & Forster, 2005).

Some top-tier universities are concerned with how to fund their international students (Bond, 2013). Approximately one fourth of international students depend on funding from U.S. colleges and universities, typically through graduate assistantships or research grants; most financial support is reserved for graduate students (Obst & Forster, 2005). Most scholarships are not available to international students, and they are also not eligible for federal loans, which account for 96% of college education lending (Bond, 2013). Maintaining funding can add to the pressure of succeeding academically, a marked source of stress for international students.

The pressure to succeed academically is both stressful and motivating for international students. Achieving their academic goals is an unsurprising objective for student sojourners who

work to enter a foreign country for studies (Eland, 2001). Although some international students continue to develop their language skills after U.S. entry, they generally reported advanced engagement and gains in their educational outcomes (Zhao, Kuh, & Carini, 2005). One explanation could be their primary focus on education, given their choice and ambition to pursue study abroad in the first place. At the same time, academically successful students are also more likely to be accepted during the admission process.

An exception to this case are undocumented international students who underperform academically as they tend to face uncertain financial circumstances, long work hours, ambiguous immigration status, and loss of communication and family support (Dozier, 2001). According to the literature, other factors that influence the academic success of student sojourners include financial need (Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007), self-esteem and confidence (Boyer & Sedlacek, 1988; Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury, 2014), language proficiency (Abel, 2002; Stoyhoff, 1997), availability of peer support (Westwood & Barker, 1990), social integration (Haydon, 2004; Telbis, Helgeson, & Kingsbury, 2014), learning strategies (Stoyhoff, 1997), campus involvement (Korobova & Starobin, 201; Parikh, 2008), and cultural adaptability (Hyun et al. 2007).

Researchers highlighted the relationship between academic success with individual factors (e.g. confidence and linguistic skills) and social factors, (e.g. campus environment, peer support, and social engagement). However, the relationship between culture and academics need further in-depth exploration (Bastien, 2011; Eland, 2001). Goodwin (2009) described *academic culture shock* as the shock that occurs in the process of encountering and adjusting to a different academic environment. Educational systems may be culturally different, in regards to structure, expectations, individual vs group work, and even teacher-student relationships (Johnson &

Kumar, 2010; Kember & Gow, 1991; Tavakoli, Lumley, Hijazi, Slavin-Spenny, & Parris, 2009). Researchers need to further address how culture interplays with the academic experiences of student sojourners (Godwin, 2009).

Systems of Support. Cultural distance and a break from the family support system contributes to the psychological distress of international students. Retaining familial support directly improves level of stress on the student sojourner (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). In Zhai's (2002) exploratory study, 70 percent of the interviewed students preferred family and friends as their main resource for help. They also reported that fellow international students became extended family members during the duration of their stay, serving as people they can lean on for emotional and social support (Zhai, 2002). Research about international students often do not consider family structure, dynamics, and influence. Most research on student sojourners center on academic success and acculturation. A growing number of studies have started to explore the tensions, commitments, and endeavors in transnational familial relationships (Baldassar, 2007).

Transnational families are marked with the desire to maintain family ties in the context of family separation (Cho, Chen, & Shin, 2010). Some of the caregiving relations between transnational families include financial, practice, personal, emotional, and moral support (Baldassar, 2007). Although international students tend to experience a deep sense of loss when they leave the families behind (Sandhu, 1995), some overcome the separation and maintain supportive familial relationships (Baldassar, Baldock, & Wilding, 2007). Overall, current literature, reflects the experiences of international students from a more individualistic perspective than familial.

International students may experience a deep sense of loss when moving to the US, in response to losing the familiarity of their language and culture and to leaving their friends, family, and support systems behind (Sandhu, 1995). It is common for them to experience feelings and thoughts similar to those indicative of a mourning process. Social support systems become critical for affirming their sense of self, building confidence, and offering emotional support (Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu, 1995). In fact, social support significantly correlated with decreased levels of psychological distress and acculturative stress of international students (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992).

Yeh and Inose (2003) found that social connectedness, as related to peer and family support, was an important component of student satisfaction and psychosocial wellbeing during their stay. Possibly, social connectedness deemed more important in some cultures than others. Researchers indicated that the loss of social support plays a significant factor in the adjustment of international students (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Pedersen, 1991). Scholars suggested that Asian, African, and Latin American cultures emphasize social connectedness and collectivity, which may make it more difficult for members of these cultures to tether away from their peer, familial, and communal connections when studying abroad (Yeh & Inose, 2003). Decreased loneliness correlated with language proficiency and communication adaptability, and length of stay was not a significant factor, which demonstrates how some international students remain isolated beyond the time of their initial arrival (Gareis et al., 2011).

International students also feel a deep sense of loss of friendships from their home country and struggle to create friendships of similar value. The availability and quality of their social support was found to buffer psychological distress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Students with more diverse support network of friends from both the host and home country

experienced higher satisfaction with their study abroad experiences and less homesickness.

Bochner, McLeod, and Lin (1977) studied three main friendship patterns of international students: (a) co-national (friends from culture of origin), (b) host-national (friends from host culture), and (c) multi-national (international students from different cultures).

Furnham and Alibhai (1984) provided more support for this model and further suggested that international student preferred co-national friends, followed by friends of other nationality, and lastly, host-national friends. This is consistent with other studies that reported limited meaningful friendships between international students and members of the host country (Bochner, Hutnik, & Furnham, 1984; Gareis & Wilkins, 2011; Ward & Masgoet, 2004). International students from collectivistic cultures may feel disappointed when looking for close friendships with host nationals, who may see friendships from a more individualistic, independent, and self-reliant belief system (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Yet, better friendships with host nationals correlated with lower psychological stress (Redmond & Bunyi, 1993; Zhai, 2002), higher life satisfaction and academic performance (Ward & Masgoet, 2004), better adjustment (Furnham & Alibhai, 1985), and better relationship with the host culture as a whole (Morgan & Arasaratnam, 2003).

Perceived support and understanding from faculty members buffered depressive symptoms, and support from their academic programs directly affected psychological distress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). Researchers found that international students were resourceful and confident in their ability to seek help when needed (Parr et al., 1992). They were more likely to seek academic, visas, and financial help from on-campus services and offices specific to international students (Zhai, 2002). Family and friends remained the top choice for emotional help. International students tended to underutilize mental health services (Baloglu 2000;

Bradley, et al., 1995), possibly because of stigma toward therapy, distrust of members in the host culture, and lack of information about what resources are available to them (Mori, 2000; Zhai, 2002). To counter cultural stigma and apprehension to seeking counseling, scholars emphasized the importance of developing multicultural sensitivity (Komiya & Eells, 2001; Pedersen, 1991). Students suggested that one-on-one meetings with faculty members and activities designed to encourage interaction between sojourners and host nationals would facilitate on-campus support for international students (Zhai, 2002).

It's no surprise that homesickness played a part in wanting to return to their country, where shared values and a sense of belongingness is comforting and familiar. Homesickness was found to be a strong predictor of poor adjustment (Ying & Liese, 1994). In other studies, it was not a significant factor (Zhai, 2002). While handling the sense of loss of family and friends back at home, international students may also experience disappointment in the social interactions and relationships of U.S. culture. International students often regard friendships in the United States to be superficial, particularly if the home culture emphasizes collectivity and closeness and the host culture emphasizes independence and individualism (Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu, 1995). If the student anticipates returning to their home country, they may even limit interactions with members of the host country (Noh & Kaspar, 2003). Given these aspects, it makes sense why some international students tend to interact with members of their cultural group, given their shared values, experiences, language, and priorities.

At one point or another, international students must decide whether to permanently immigrate the United States or return to their country-of-origin, which can be a stressful endeavor (Hazen & Alberts, 2006). Repatriation is a term that refers to the process of returning to one's country of origin (Herbert, 1995). It was estimated that 60% international students in

the 1990s planned to stay in the US, but few sources report how many actually did stay (Alberts & Hazen, 2005). International students often weigh the advantages and disadvantages of their home in comparison to the host country when deciding to remain visitors or become immigrants. According to their study, Hazen and Alberts (2006) found that friends, family, better quality of life, and feeling more comfortable were the top advantages of returning to their home country, whereas better job opportunities, higher standard of living, and greater academic freedom marked the advantages of staying. On the flipside, poorer job opportunities, political situation, and restrictive cultural practices were cons of moving back home. In contrast, top disadvantages of staying in the United States included alienation from U.S. culture, different understandings of friendship, different priorities, and racism (Hazen & Alberts, 2006).

Language and Culture

Language proficiency has been found to be a significant source of stress for international students (Church, 1982; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mori, 2000; Padilla et al., 1986; Ward & Masgoret, 2004). This may be more applicable to students from countries where English is not commonly spoken or students who have limited experience in English language courses. Struggling academically in the United States due to language, cultural, and adjustment issues can be particularly frustrating for students who used to be high achievers in their home country (Chen, 1999; Pedersen, 1991; Zhai, 2002).

Linguistic issues contributed to problems in their social interactions with students of the host culture, straining communication in both academic and interpersonal settings (Andrade, 2006; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhai, 2002). Even international students with substantial language skills reported psychological distress, demonstrating how language barrier is just one of the many adjustments that sojourners need to make (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008;

Ryan & Twibell, 2000). Sias and colleagues (2008) found that language difficulties could encourage more communication because of intentional efforts to understand and connect with others. With experience, student sojourners may learn how to use these linguistic issues to their advantage. In some cases, intercultural friendships were not negatively affected by limited English skills (Sia et al., 2008).

Language is the vehicle for conveying meaning and facilitating effective communication, but intercultural communication expands beyond linguistic skills. Cultural differences exist in regards to self-disclosure (Gareis, Merkin, & Goldman, 2011), level of emotional expression (Mortenson, 2005), love expression (Gareis & Wilkins, 2011), and even the meaning and development of friendship over time (Wierzbicka, 1997). Inconsistent findings were unable to indicate how student sojourners' willingness to communicate influence intercultural communication. However, one study reported that it had no significant impact on peer relationships (Massengill & Nash, 2009), and another study reported a positive correlation between willingness to communicate and intercultural friendships (Kassing, 1997). Being able to adapt to various forms of communication has been considered a salient influence on intracultural (within cultural group) friendships (Samster, 2003), but not yet explored in intercultural (across cultural groups) friendships. Chen (1992) reported that foreign students with higher communicative adaptability were more likely to interact with others and cope with social barriers in the host culture.

Acculturation and Culture Shock. Upon arrival, international students have a limited period of time in which the process of acculturation takes place. This migration process can be challenging. The literature on migration consisted mostly of large-scaled, cross-national studies from epidemiological and mental health perspectives (Zhou et al., 2008). Recent studies on

international students used smaller samples. Systematic research on student sojourners budded during the 1950s (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) and has been growing since then.

Acculturation was initially conceptualized as a one-dimensional model where migrating persons replace their culture with the culture of the host country (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). The understanding of acculturation has evolved into a bi-dimensional process (Smith & Khacwaja, 2011), where dual processes occur between two or more cultures. Berry (1997) identified four acculturation strategies and their associated level of acculturative stress: (a) integration, (b) assimilation, (c) separation, and (d) marginalization (see Table 1).

Table 1

Acculturation Strategies (Berry, 1997; 2003)

Acculturation Strategy	Identification with Home Culture	Identification with Host Culture	Level of Acculturative Stress
Integration/Bicultural	High	High	Lowest
Assimilation	Low	High	Intermediate
Separation	High	Low	Intermediate
Marginalization	Low	Low	Highest

Ward and Kennedy (1994) reported that people with low identification with both their home and host culture (marginalized) experienced the most stress while those with high identification with their home and host culture (bicultural) experienced the least stress. A longitudinal study on international students found no advantage for those with bicultural strategy and showed how those with a separation attitude experienced the lowest level of social adaptation (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008). Most literature on international students focused on the adjustment issues and acculturative stress that permeate their lives (Berry, 2005; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994).

Acculturative stress was defined as “the process of change that takes place as a result of two or more cultures coming into contact” (Smith & Khawaja, 2011, p. 3). Major factors in acculturative stress include homesickness, fear, guilt, perceived hatred, discrimination, and culture shock-related stress (Andrade, 2006; Mori, 2000; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). The first four months of transitioning was found to be the most stressful time for international students (Cemalcilar & Falbo, 2008). Low maladaptive perfectionism only buffered acculturative stress after a lengthy stay in United States, thus even students with realistic, healthy expectations experience the effects of acculturative stress as a part of sojourner adjustment (Wei et al., 2007). European students experienced significantly lower levels of acculturative stress, possibly because of less contrast in cultural values, patterns of interaction, as well as fewer experiences of racism and discrimination (Yeh & Inose, 2003).

Adjustment to a different country can be more difficult if the student sojourner is unaware of the cultural differences. Zhou and colleagues (2008) defined culture shock as the experience of collective unfamiliarity with a culture in which the student traveler is immersed. Introduced by Oberg (1960), the term *culture shock* is considered a normal process that occurs when people are introduced to a culture different from their own. Similar concepts to culture shock are *cultural fatigue* (Guthrie, 1975), *language shock* (Smalley, 1963), *role shock* (Byrnes, 1966), and as mentioned earlier, *academic culture shock* (Godwin, 2009). What these concepts have in common is the anxiety that arises from unfamiliarity of the host culture and a general sense of ambiguity that pervades a sojourner’s adjustment.

Researcher have described adjustment as a U curve, starting with hope and optimism followed by a downward swoop before recovering (Church, 1982; Lysgaard, 1955), or even a W curve to address the re-acculturation that occurs when they return to their home culture

(Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Oberg (1960) detailed four stages that characterize sojourner adjustment (see Figure 1) in a linear fashion that does not predict future cross-cultural adjustments, such as returning to the home culture or moving elsewhere.

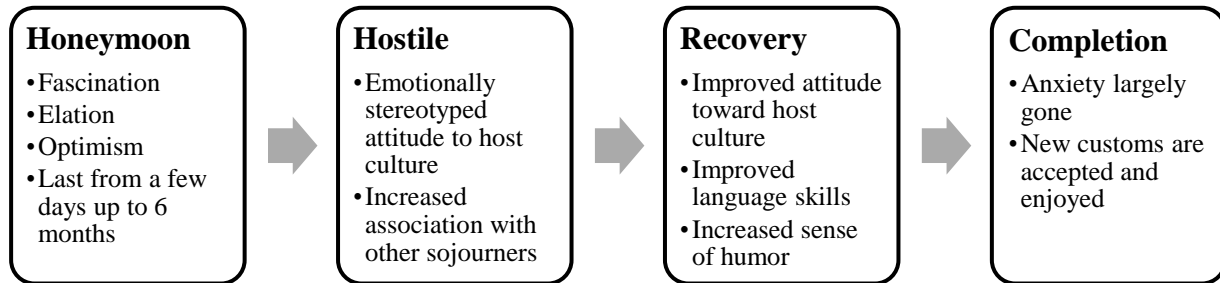


Figure 1. Stages for sojourner adjustment (Oberg, 1960).

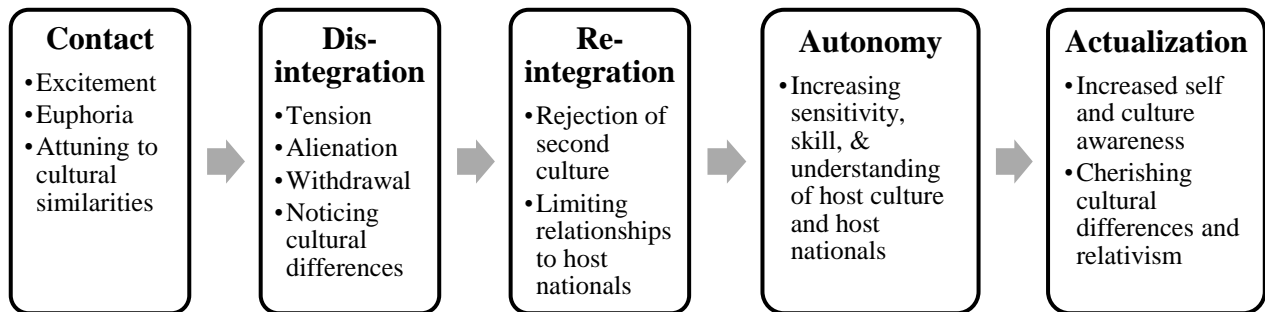


Figure 2. Phases for sojourner adjustment (Adler, 1975).

Adler's (1975) five phases implied lasting self-actualized growth, but both stage models neglected the reciprocal relationship and adjustment between the sojourner and host culture (see Figure 2). Despite their intuitive assumption, these models for sojourner adjustment failed to tailor their approaches to varying experiences of sojourner (not all sojourners begin with a "honeymoon phase"), and they also do not account for other factors such as how welcoming or discriminating the host culture is in response to the sojourner, identity gap, communicative adaptability, and so forth.

Racism and Discrimination. Perceived discrimination is also one of the most common stressors in the experiences of international students (Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). Both the level of acculturation and discrimination influences an international student's identity gaps (Jung et

al., 2007). However, acculturation has a less direct effect on depressive symptoms than perceived discrimination, which significantly correlates with psychological distress (Noh & Kaspar, 2003). European international students reported less experiences of racism and discrimination. One hypothesis is that students who appear White racially have improved chances of “fitting in” (Yeh & Inose). However, this could also be related to language proficiency, as European international students tend to have less language difficulties.

Gaps in the Literature

The literature largely emphasized the disparities of international students (Olivas & Li, 2006). While it is important to acknowledge the challenges of being a sojourner, it's also important to identify their strengths and areas of resilience. Study abroad may yield fruitful learning experiences and challenge people to grow from living in a new culture, yet this process is not reflected in the research as often. This may be related to the lack of longitudinal studies on international students. Longitudinal studies that follow up with them even after they return to their home country can help us understand how their travel experiences have impacted them long-term and what they have learned from their travels.

Another gap in the research is understanding how ambiguous loss (of their culture, home country, community, family, etc.) may play a role in the acculturation process for international students. The acculturation process, at times, is described as an individual process, rather than a network of evolving relationships between sojourners, their home culture and host culture. Further, terms such as assimilation and acculturation are problematic in their linear fashion of describing the complex transitions for sojourners. There is increasing research on campus community and peer support, but not much research on families of sojourners and how their family relationships change throughout their study abroad in the United States.

We also need to understand better how cultural identity development differs for international students. Though there are various cultural identity models, most have been applied to specific ethnic minority groups in the United States or immigrant populations. Models built on samples of racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States may not fit with the experiences of international students, in which the process of entry into the country and potential of repatriation is different. International students are still generally treated as a homogenous population. Studies are unlikely to differentiate between the experiences of undergraduate versus graduate students, students from different socioeconomic situations, family backgrounds, religious beliefs, among various other important aspects of their background. Finally, we do not know enough about how cultural identity interact with sexual and gender identity.

Cultural Identity Models

Sussman (2002) stated, “The nature of the sojourner is one of cycle: moving to a new country and moving home; the process of adjustment and the outcome of adaption; culture shock and reverse shock” (p. 391). Understanding the challenges and experiences of international students offer an important backdrop to consider when discussing cultural identity development. Given the complexity of a sojourner’s experience, researchers are working on cultural identity models that can adequately address these complexities. Various cultural identity models have been used since the late 1900s (see Table 2). Some were specific to a particular ethnic/racial group (e.g. Black identity, Latino/a identity), while others aimed to be generalizable to any cultural or ethnic group. Atkinson and colleagues (1989) criticized the fixed nature of precursor models so they aimed to create a dynamic, evolving model. Their minority identity development model does not rest on fixed personality traits and is not culture-specific, but presents a linear progression.

Recent models on cultural identity development, such as Sussman's (2002) cultural identity model is cyclic and focuses on the whole cycle or the relationships between segments of the cycle. From a social psychological framework, Sussman (2000) proposed an integrated theory of the transitioning self-concept and cultural identity. The cultural identity model (CIM) includes the following tenets: (1) cultural identity is a latent, but critical aspect of self-concept; (2) salience of cultural identity is related to cultural transitions; (3) cultural identity is dynamic and responds to overseas transition and self-concept disturbances; and (4) shifts in cultural identity mediates the relationship between cultural adaptation and the going home experience (Sussman, 2002). At the end of the cycle, the sojourner's post-adaptation identity can be classified into one of four types: affirmative (sojourner affirms home cultural identity), additive (sojourner adopts aspects of host culture), subtractive (sojourner loses aspects of home culture), and global (sojourner feels a sense of global community) (Sussman, 2000; 2002). Global and affirmative post-adaptation experiences are considered positive while additive and subtractive ways of adjusting negatively shape the experiences of the sojourner.

Sexual Identity Models

Sexual identity models that focus on the disclosure process have been critiqued for their gender bias (Herbert, 1995), sequential and linear approach (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1995), or tendency to focus on mono-sexual identities (e.g. lesbian, gay). Queer theory, a postmodern movement, challenges the developmental stages in sexual identity models altogether, given the movement's aim to deconstruct identity labels. Queer theories argue that the rigidity of these categories further stigmatize LGBTQ people. Despite their limitations, other theorists suggest the usefulness of such labels.

Society largely assumes that individuals are heterosexual and lead heterosexual relationships and lives, a bias that promotes heteronormativity (Bogaert & Hafer, 2009). Individuals and families that do not fit with these assumptions often encounter psychological distress related to facing homophobia and heterosexism (Herek, 2004). “Coming out” is defined as “the process of realizing and accepting non-heterosexual identity” (Manning, 2015, p. 122). It is a process of acknowledging their sexual orientation, adopting their sexual identities, and sharing them with others (Rust, 1993). Anxiety, confusion, discomfort, and potential rejection from family and friends mark the coming out experiences of a LGBTQ person (Manning, 2015).

“Coming out” refers to the ongoing process of disclosing sexual identity for LGBTQ persons (Cass, 1979). It is both an internal (coming out to oneself) and external (coming out to friends, families, coworkers, etc.) that acknowledges one’s LGBTQ identity. Manning and colleagues (2014) described a typology of coming-out conversations, which includes: (a) pre-planned conversations, (b) emergent conversations, (c) coaxed conversations, (d) confrontational conversations, (e) romantic/sexual conversations, (f) education/activist conversations, and (g) mediated conversation, emphasizing the co-constructed process of the disclosure process. Some theories of identity formation included the coming out process as a critical part of sexual identity development and construction (Tamashiro, 2007).

One of the first sexual identity models is Cass’s (1979) Homosexual Identity Model, which outlined five mental stages during sexual identity development for LGB people: Identity Confusion, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride, and Identity Synthesis. Troiden (1988) shifted from these linear stages and argued that coming out is a forward and backward process, resembling a horizontal spiral in which the individual oscillates between acceptance and rejection. In contrast, D’Augelli (1994) adopted a development view of sexual

orientation identity development, looking at the six areas of exiting heterosexual identity, developing a gay identity status, developing a gay social identity, becoming a gay offspring, developing a gay intimacy status, and entering a gay community.

Rust (1993) suggested that identity development and the coming out process is not a linear, goal-oriented process. Though these sexual identity models provide a beginning framework for understanding the coming out process, they also often neglected racial and ethnic considerations of coming out (Gonzales & Espin, 1996; Greene, 1994). They also assume a hegemonic whiteness (Rosario et al., 2006). Relational elements were minimized, and coming out was described as an individual, introspective process (Manning et al., 2014). In addition, some of the models present sexual identity as more of a binary, rather than a spectrum of various identities, experiences, and privileges.

Rust (1993) stated, “Sexual identity formation must be reconceptualized as a process of describing one’s social location within a changing social context,” suggesting that social interaction between a person and place of location shapes sexual identity. Coming out presents a two-fold process that involves identifying one’s sexual identity and then choosing to disclose this sexual identity to others (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Both developmental models of sexual and cultural identity insinuate a beginning and terminating point that showcases the progressively, positive value of disclosing one’s sexual identity or achieving one’s cultural identity. While cultural identity models do not address sexual identity development, sexual identity models are often not situated in a cultural context. Table 2 juxtaposes developmental models of sexual identity and cultural identity (Herbert, 1995).

Table 2

Models on Cultural and Sexual Identity Development (Herbert, 1995).

Cultural Identity Models	Sexual Identity Models
<p>Cross (1971) Black Identity (a) pre-encounter (assimilation), (b) encounter, (c) immersion-emersion, (d) internalization</p>	<p>Cass (1979) Gay and Lesbian Identities (a) identity confusion, (b) identity comparison, (c) identity tolerance, (d) identity acceptance, (e) identity pride, (f) identity synthesis</p>
<p>Jackson (1975) Black Identity (a) passive-acceptance, (b) active-resistance, (c) redirection, (d) internalization</p>	<p>Troiden (1988) Gay and Lesbian identities (a) sensitization, (b) identity confusion, (c) identity assumption, (d) identity commitment</p>
<p>Atkinson, Morten, & Sue (1989) Minority Identity (a) conformity, (b) dissonance, (c) resistance and immersion, (d) introspection, (e) synergetic articulation and awareness</p>	<p>Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor (1994) Bisexual identity (a) initial confusion, (b) finding a label, (c) settling into the identity and self-acceptance, (d) continued uncertainty</p>
<p>Phinney (1989) Minority Adolescents (a) diffused identity, (b) foreclosed identity, (c) moratorium identity, (d) achieved identity</p>	<p>Bradford (1997) Bisexual identity (a) questioning reality, (b) inventing identity, (c) maintaining identity, (d) transforming adversity</p>
<p>Sodowsky, Kwan, & Pannu (1995) Nonlinear Model of Acculturation) (a) integration, (b) assimilation, (c) separation, (d) marginalization</p>	<p>Carrion & Lock (1997) Gay and Lesbian Identities (a) internal discovery of sexual orientation, (b) inner exploration of attraction to sexual object, (c) early acceptance of an integrated sexual self, (d) congruence probing, (e) further acceptance of an integrated sexual self, (f) self-esteem consolidation, (g) mature formation of an integrated self-identity, (h) integrated self-identity within a social context</p>
<p>Helms & Cook (1999) Dominant-Culture-Identity Development Model (a) contact, (b) disintegration, (c) reintegration, (d) pseudo-independence, (e) immersion, (f) emersion, (g) autonomy</p>	
<p>Ferdman & Gallegos (2007) Latino/a Racial Identity Orientations (a) Latino-integrated, (b) Latino-identified, (c) subgroup identified, (d) Latino as other, (e) undifferentiated/denial, (f) White-identified</p>	<p>Morris (1997) Lesbian Identity (a) sexual identity formation or self-awareness of being lesbian, (b) disclosure of sexual orientation to others, (c) sexual expression and sexual behavior, (d) lesbian consciousness</p>

Multidimensional Identity Models

Several theorists that critiqued the linear fashion of cultural and sexual identity models have tried to construct a more inclusive, dynamic view of identity development. Reynolds and Pope's (1991) model was one that considered multiple identities from the perspective of multiple oppressions. Their Multidimensional Identity Model showed four possible ways that a person may negotiate multiple oppressions: (a) identify with one aspect of self passively, (b) identifying with one aspect of self intentionally, (c) identifying with multiple aspects of self in a "segmented fashion" (Reynolds & Pope, 1991, p. 179), and (d) identifying with multiple aspects of self and oppressions consciously integrating them.

Eliason's (1996) model of identity formation, which had been used to describe sexual identity development, consisted of four cycles: (a) pre-identity, (b) emerging identities, (c) experiences and recognition of oppression, and (d) reevaluation/evolution of identities, while Myers & Speight (1991) model of identity portrayed an outward spiral of six phases: (a) absence of conscious awareness, (b) individuation, (c) dissonance, (d) immersion, (e) internalization, (f) integration, and (g) transformation, to show the process of integrating an expanding sense of self. The idea of living melding multiple identities in a fluid and dynamic manner was further highlighted in Jones and McEwen's (2000) conceptual model of intersecting dimensions of identity (Figure 3). In this model, sense of self is "defined both internally by self and externally by others" (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 406). This conceptual model was updated (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) to include the meaning-making capacity which filters the interaction between self-perceptions of multiple identity and contextual influences (Figure 4). Consistent with this model of multiple identity dimensions, Rust (1993) described identity development as a continuous interaction between an individual and their social location.

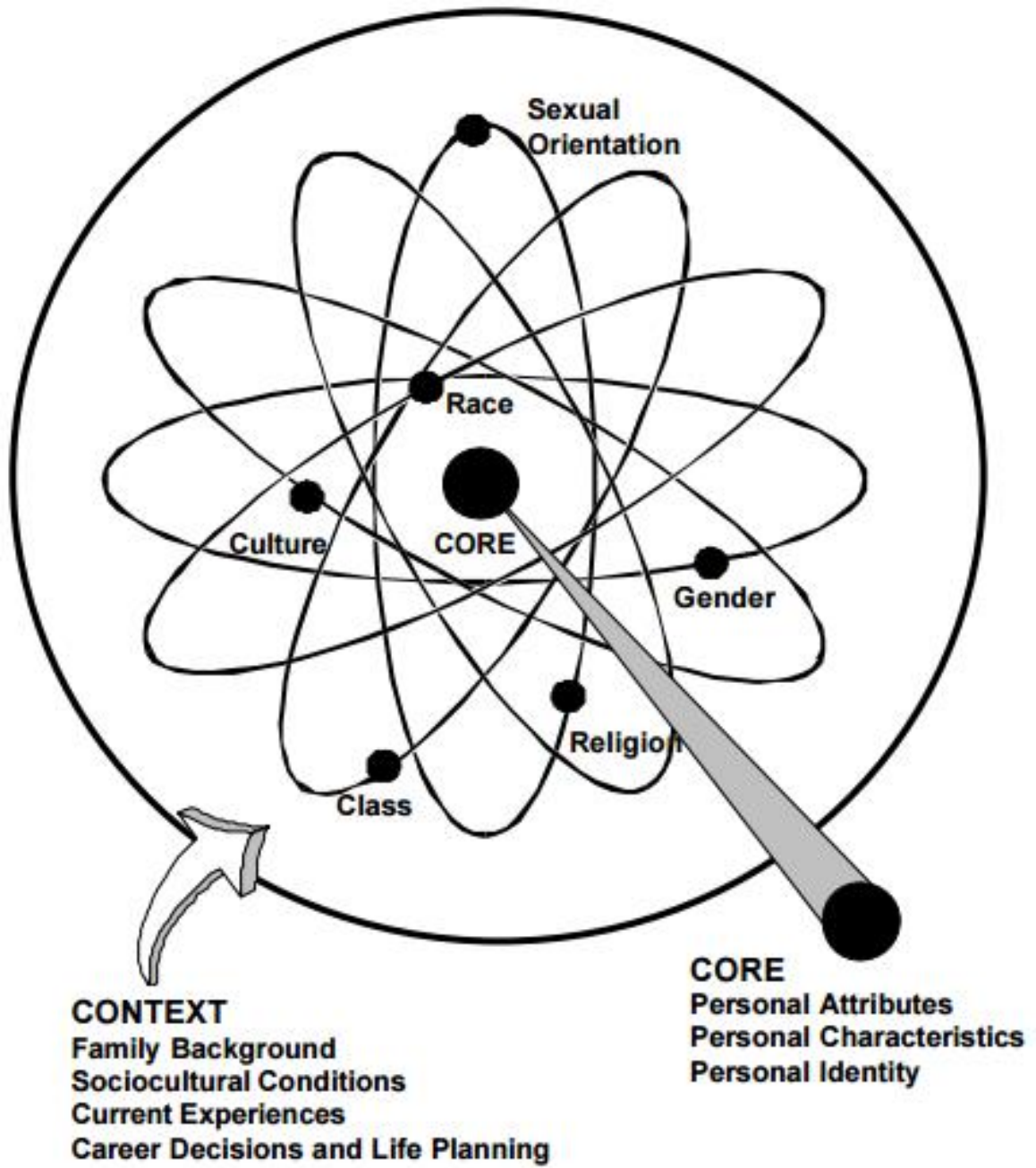


Figure 3. Model of multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

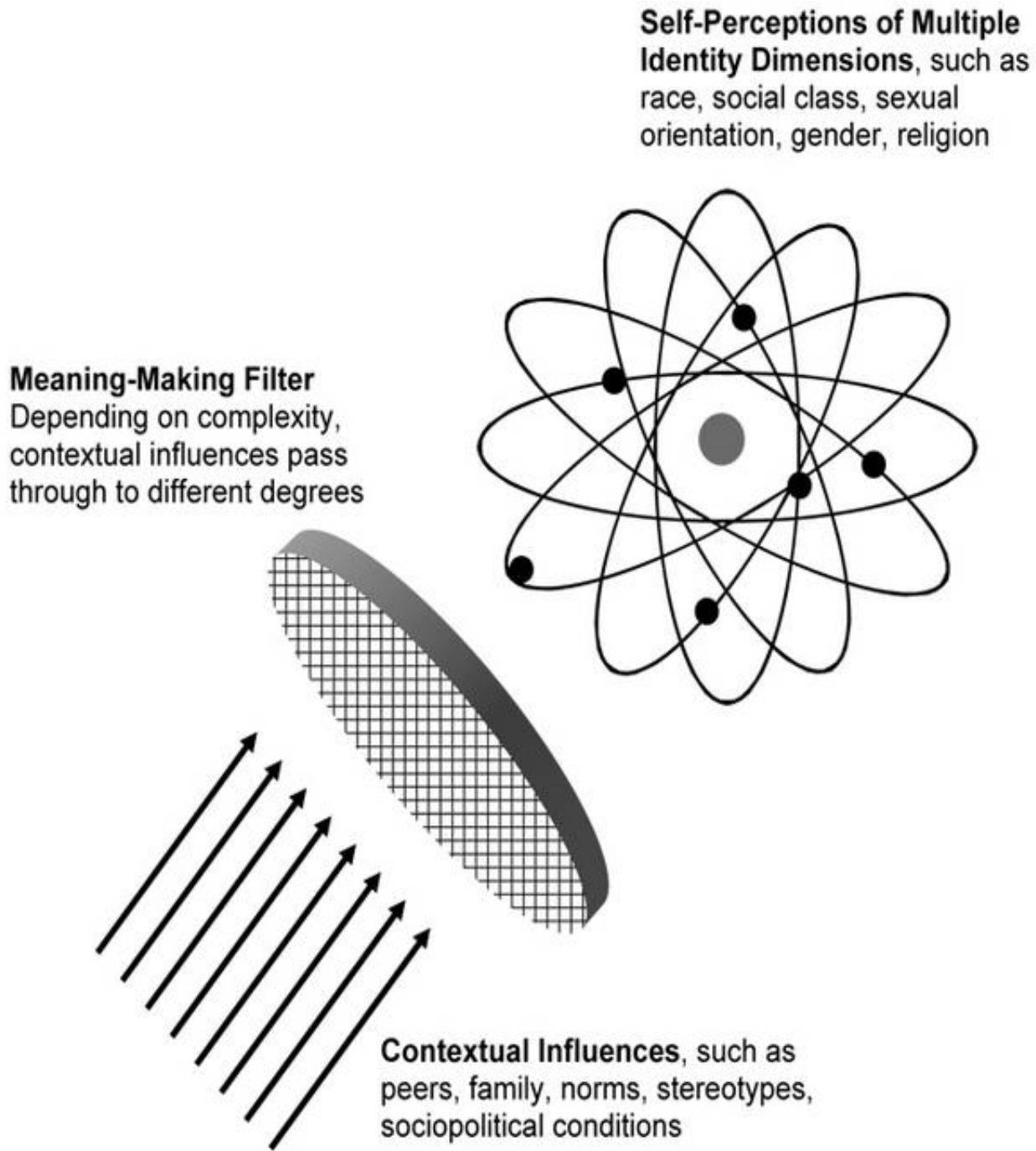


Figure 4. Reconceptualized model (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007).

Somers (1994) argued that models of identity formation can slide into categorical views of identity. Approaching identity from a narrative conceptualization is one of unpacking those categories, relying on story-telling to provide a fuller, holistic understanding. If models are the recipes that detail the ingredients and cooking process, narratives are the stories a person tells about the experience of eating a favorite dish from childhood—all its tastes, smells, and memories. Both are important and lends different strengths. In particular, a narrative approach is helpful for understanding complex interconnections between various dimensions of identity.

A close identification with one's ethnic identity has been associated with higher risk for depressive symptoms (Abu-Rayya, 2006). However, it is not the ethnic identity that creates problem for the international student, but rather the gap or conflict between how the student sees, expresses, and interprets their self-concept versus the self-concept attributed to them from the lens of members in the host culture. Identity gaps may exist between how U.S. college students perceive an international student in comparison to the how international students experience themselves (Jung & Hecht, 2004). Jung and colleagues (2007) referred to identity gaps as the “the differences between or among different layers of identity and tends to occur in the process or as a result of communication” (p. 607). The incongruence between outer and inner self becomes depressing and frustrating (Jung & Hecht, 2004; Jack, 1999; Gardner & Price, 1999).

Systematic Review on LGBQ International Students

While there is a growing number of studies on the intersection of ethnic and sexual identities for immigrants and native citizens of the US, few studies explore the experiences of LGBQ international students, particularly their process of disclosing sexual identity. Thus, I conducted a systematic review to determine what we currently know about LGBQ international students. The systematic review is guided by the PRISMA protocol (Robertson-Malt, 2014).

Inclusion Criteria. Given the dearth in the literature on this topic, I chose to include both empirical and conceptual articles. My initial search selected peer-reviewed articles, which I later supplemented with a hand search (cross-referencing citations from the eligible articles) and gray literature search using the same Boolean parameters. Gray literature refers to information outside peer-reviewed journals such as dissertations or magazine articles. My criteria required articles to focus on LGBTQ-identified international students. Unless international students were specifically included as a part of the sample or population of interest, I did not include articles on queer people of color.

Literature Search Strategy. The electronic search was conducted with EBSCOhost which included the following databases: Academic Search Complete (1887-present), Family & Society Studies Worldwide (1900s-present), PsycInfo (1894-present), and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection (1930-present) databases. I limited the search to peer-reviewed articles and used the following Boolean search parameters: (homosexual OR lesbian OR gay OR bisexual OR LGB* OR queer OR "sexual minority" OR "sexual identity" OR "sexual orientation") AND ("overseas students" OR "international students" OR "foreign students" OR sojourner*).

The electronic search produced 77 articles, the gray literature search produced 6 theses and dissertations, and the hand search added 3 articles. There were 82 unique articles after deleting the duplicates, and screening by title and abstract for eligibility narrowed this down to 12 articles. One of these 12 articles did not meet the inclusion criteria after the full text screening, resulting in a final sample of 11 eligible articles for the review. The search strategy and retrieval process are displayed in Figure 5.

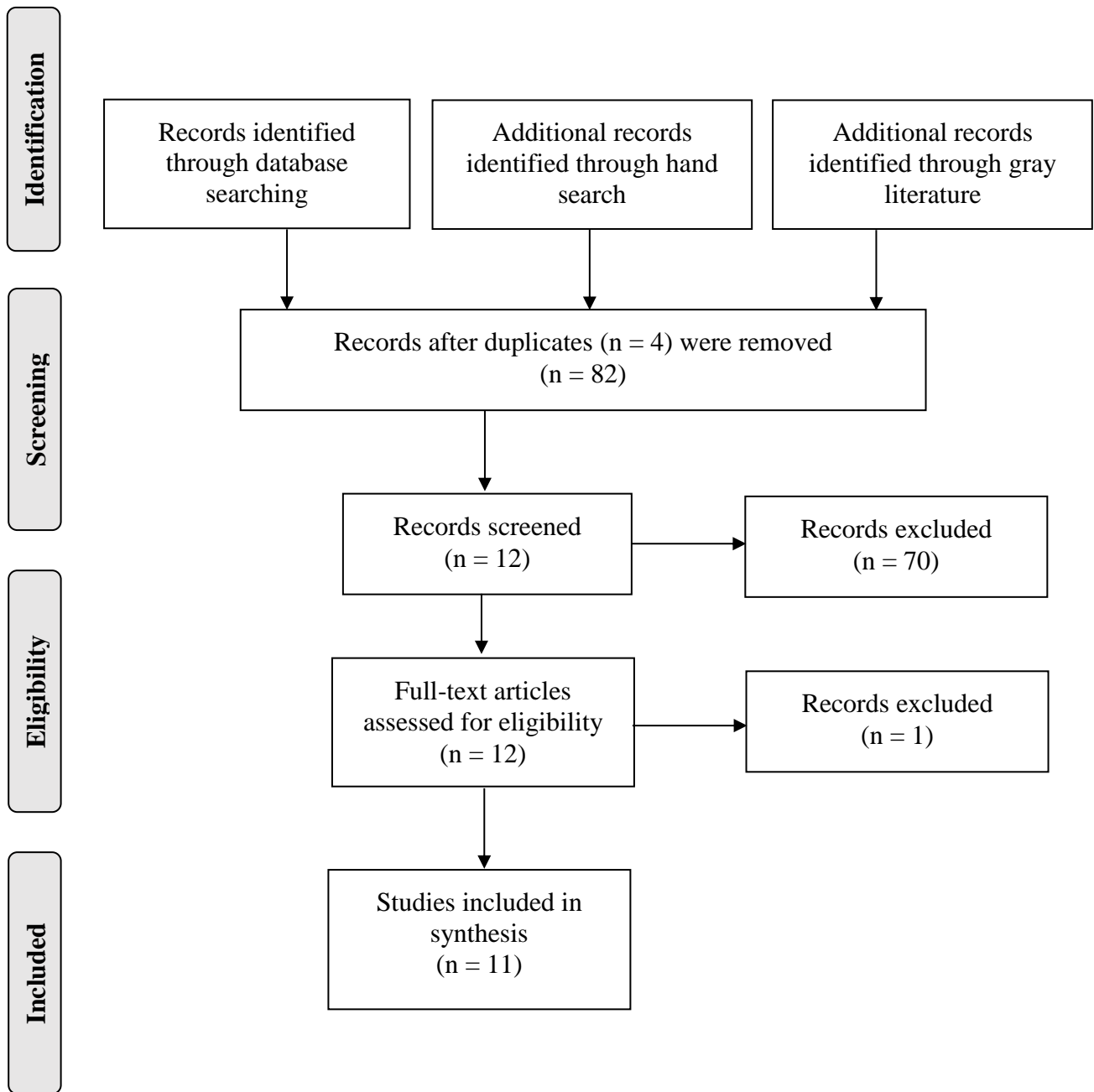


Figure 5. PRISMA flow diagram.

Data Extraction. Using reference manager Endnote, I organized the eligible full text articles that fit the inclusion criteria for a closer analysis. I used a code sheet to analyze the article's purpose, type, population of interest, implications, and conclusions of the article. I examined the theoretical approach of the author used as the foundation for the paper and the research design if the article was empirical. I was also interested in the field of study the article originated from. The results are shown in table 3 and table 4. Data synthesis was conducted using content analysis, providing mostly descriptive information about each article.

Data Synthesis. All empirical theses and dissertations (n=6) used a qualitative method to explore this topic. Researchers used phenomenology, action research, ethnographic, or interpretivist qualitative methods. The majority of them originated from the field of education or student leadership. The second most common field is counseling and clinical psychology. Only one article came from the field of family studies and human development. Articles were either published in education or LGBT-related journals.

Four of the studies focused on Asian and Asian American students or students who came from China. Two studies were centered at Canadian universities and one in the United States. The other three studies recruited from multiple U.S. institutions. Four studies described the coming out process and discussed identity formation for these students. Two studies focused on experiences of multi-minority statuses and discrimination. One article and one dissertation discussed the influence of family relationships and expectations. Qualitative methodology was used for all the studies including: phenomenology, situational analysis, ethnography, and action research.

Table 3

Systematic Review Sample

#	Author(s)	Year	Type	Journal/Book Title	Field	Population of interest
1	Nelson	2005	Article	<i>Journal of Curriculum Theorizing</i>	Education/English language study skills	Queer English as a Second Language (ESL) students
2	Oba & Pope	2013	Article	<i>Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling</i>	Counseling psychology & community services	LGBT international students
3	Quach et al.	2013	Article	<i>Journal of GLBT Family Studies</i>	Family studies & community development	GLB Chinese international students
4	Herbert	2003	Dissertation	<i>Not applicable</i>	Clinical psychology	LGQ (queer) international students
5	Narui	2010	Dissertation	<i>Not applicable</i>	Education	Asian & Asian American GLB students
6	Tang	2007	Thesis	<i>Not applicable</i>	Leadership & training	Gay & lesbian international students
7	Patrick	2014	Thesis	<i>Not applicable</i>	Education	Queer international students
8	Yang	2015	Thesis	<i>Not applicable</i>	Counseling & educational leadership	LGB international students from China
9	Weitz	2015	Thesis	<i>Not applicable</i>	Asian & Asian American studies	Queer Asian & Asian American students
10	Pope et al.	2007	Book chapter	<i>Handbook for Counseling International Students in the US</i>	Counseling & educational psychology	GLBQ (questioning) international students
11	Valosik	2015	Magazine article	<i>International Educator</i>	Foreign student affairs	LGBT international students

Table 4

Systematic Review Findings

#	Research Design / Theory	Sample	Purpose	Primary Findings
1	Not applicable	Not applicable	Examine how queer narratives & be considered in classrooms	Need to think transnationally when teaching & explore narratives
2	Not applicable	Not applicable	Identify how mental health professionals need to provide support for LGBT international students	Four challenges of using counseling services, the role of international student services, building a support group, & issues in returning to home countries
3	Not applicable	Not applicable	Reviews current models of sexual identity models & their application for students from China	Models need to be tested considering importance of collectivism, filial piety, & social expectations in Chinese culture.
4	Phenomenology	9 LBQ international female students	Explore the influence of cultural factors on sexual identity development, decisions to stay in US, stressors, & coping	Migration influence & lack of other's awareness, need for culturally appropriate & inclusive theories about sexual identity development
5	Situational analysis / Foucauldian	9 GLB Asian/American students	Understand how & why Asian/American GLB student disclose & how disclosure influence identity construction	Correlation between self-identity & willingness to reveal orientation, & aspects of social map/arena
6	Action research / Systems & organization context	3 gay male students & 4 student services professionals	Examine support for gay & lesbian students at one Canadian university	Need to raise awareness, safety, & include topics in curriculum
7	Interpretivist / Queer, feminist, & gender theory, social constructionism	7 GLQ international students	Examine experiences & level of queer acceptance & homophobic discrimination in one Canadian university	Perceived acceptance is related to degree of reflexivity, self-understanding, sexual expression, openness, & optimistic reframing

Table 4 cont.

8	Ethnographic qualitative / Acculturation, R-MMDI, & Q-MMDI (multi-intersecting identities, heteronormativity, & performativity)	6 gay & lesbian international students	Understand college experiences of LGB students from China with regards to how they make meaning of the multi-identity dimensions	Themes found include the influence of heteronormativity, acculturation, & identity formation
9	Phenomenology / Foucauldian	8 queer Asian/American students	Examine discrimination & cultural inclusivity in one U.S. university for queer Asian/American students	Discrimination of racial & sexual identities & need for increased discussions on queer Asian topics in student/cultural groups & campus administration
10	Not applicable	Not applicable	Identify unique issues that GLBQ international students may confront & offer guidelines	GLBQ international student brochure conveys information about identity, coming-out process, immigration concerns, relationships, etc.
11	Not applicable	Not applicable	Identify LGBT international student needs for support	Create safe space, learn vocabulary, avoid assumptions, establish affirm relationships, campus wide change

The systematic review helped me to identify previous studies on LGBTQ international students that serve as a foundation of understanding for this study and acknowledge potential gaps that need to be addressed. For instance, the scholarship on this area focused less on family relationships, despite the importance of family relationships in the experiences of international students. Emerging from the education and leadership field, most studies understandably focused on the university setting and campus resources. Thus, the present study builds upon this foundation to focus on family relationships and the cultural narratives that shape the coming-out process for LGBTQ international students. Scholars on this topic area emphasized how important it is to situate the disclosure of sexual identity process in cultural contexts. This fits with the objectives of the present study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Social Constructivism. Social constructivism guides the interpretative framework and values of this research study. As a paradigm worldview, social constructivism's ontological belief, which refers to the belief that guides our understanding about the nature of reality, is that individuals co-construct multiple realities through their experiences, interactions, and the use of language. Reality is not represented in truths waiting to be discovered, but rather, reality unfolds through how we construct our experiences and interactions. This understanding portrays reality as a dynamic process that represents a collective creation of individuals involved in the interaction.

Epistemology refers to the way in which researchers come to know what they know. Social constructivism's epistemological belief centers on how researchers and participants co-construct reality. The knowledge that researchers accumulate is shaped by this mutual exchange. In this sense, no one person can truly take ownership of this knowledge. Thus, the axiological

belief of this framework honors the negotiation of values among individuals participating in the co-construction of knowledge. Language becomes the vehicle in which individuals, namely the researcher and participant in this study, use to co-create meaning and reality. As we engage in conversation, language is a “construction that provides the ground onto which constructs, and therefore reality can be created and performed” (Gemignani & Pena, 2007, p. 286). The way in which language shapes the narratives of sojourners is an important consideration given the potential language barriers and cultural differences in linguistic structure and meaning.

Social constructivists challenge the essentialist assumptions of sexuality (Rust, 1993) that assumes static, fixed categories of sexual identity and coming out stages. Similarly, essentialist claims about cultural identity and concepts of assimilation and “Americanization” neglects the co-constructed nature of culture and individuals and their interactions as participants in a culture. Researchers on student affairs increasingly apply social constructivism rather than essentialism to explore how students develop their identity (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). Inherent in essentialist assumptions is the notion of what is healthy and what is dysfunctional. This is an important consideration when studying LGBTQ individuals who come from different cultures with various institutional structures different from those in the United States. Ideals of health and function in this case, must be considered the sociocultural, historical, and political contexts of the international student. For the sojourner, this process may be enhanced by their transitions among different cultures with different understandings and meanings about sexual identity that has been constructed among the participants of various cultures.

Narrative Family Therapy. As a theoretical lens, narrative family therapy fits well within the social constructivist paradigm because of its emphasis on how co-authors shape dominant and alternative narratives through their lived experiences (White & Epston, 1990). In

this study, participants and I become co-authors by using language to co-construct their stories and honor the multiple, interrelated narratives that collectively describe their experiences, rather than reducing it to a single, one-dimensional story. From a narrative lens, the generation or re-generation of new stories are enhanced by engaging with an “external” audience, which in this study would be the researcher who is both an audience for the participants’ stories and an active contributor to the construction of their narratives. “Those aspects of lived experience that fall outside of the dominant story provide a rich and fertile source for the generation, or re-generation, of alternative stories” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 15). LGBTQ sojourners, when discussing their coming in and coming out process, will have dominant and alternative narratives from both their home and host culture. The experience of discussing one’s sexual identity in of itself is a process that helps the participant co-construct their identity through interactions with others.

Temporal dimension. White and Epston (1990) discussed how Bateson’s work in systems theory drew their attention to the dimension of time, which had been neglected in the field of therapy. Aside from using social constructivism as a paradigm for understanding meaning as it has been co-constructed by individuals’ experiences and interactions, I also want to attend to the temporal dimensions as it relates to the experiences of my participants and their interactions with multiple cultural narratives about sexual identity. The notion of narratives allows us to consider how co-authors shape meaning and knowledge, and it also requires placing events in cross-time patterns. Narrative therapy has been used as a lens to help clients with the meaning-making process of understanding their sexual identity by helping them map the dominant story, preferred metaphors, emerging alternative stories, cultural and institutional influences, and emphasize identity congruence in their transformative sexual identity

development (Yarhouse, 2008). It is important to consider this meaning-making process in a temporal lens as sojourners may find themselves transition between different cultural contexts within the time span of their study abroad in the United States.

Stories and power. Foucault proposed that the operation of power construct and produce “truths” (Foucault, 1980; White & Epston, 1990). Stories that are told more often and are more commonly heard hold more power, and those privileged with more power have access to larger audiences for their stories. Foucault concluded that truths and power are inseparable, which is not inherently problematic unless it is exploited to suit the needs of people in positions of power. This theoretical underpinning is a part of this study, in which the objective is to highlight and honor the untold stories of international students who hold multi-minority statuses in the realm of culture, sexual identity, and in their experience as sojourners in a foreign land.

Intersectionality. The concept of intersectionality—the idea that each person has multiple identities that intertwine with one another in a dynamic and fluid manner—serves as a lens for conceptualizing identity in this study. The concept emerged from the field of critical race theory, having been credited to the writings of Kimberle Crenshaw (1989/1993) who highlighted the issues of isolating race or gender when looking at the collective experiences of oppression and privilege in a person’s life (Cole, 2009). To dissect only one identity or part of their identity is to ignore the interrelatedness of other aspects of who they are. It is not enough to discuss the privilege and power differentials between men and women, without asking questions like which men and which women? (Warner, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013).

In a sense, it is difficult to tether apart these intersecting identities, and to do so would neglect the holistic nature of identity and self. For instance, when studying the measures of discrimination for LGBTQ youth who are also part of an ethnic minority often encounter the

challenge of measuring sexual orientation-related discrimination versus racial-related discrimination. Even the person who is experiencing discrimination on both levels may find it difficult to delineate the two. Part of it is that experiences of discrimination comes in different forms, from overt to more subtle manners. This furthers complicate the process of separating the specific identity the discrimination is directed to. Few-Demo (2014) noted the importance of conducting research from an intersectional lens while warning researchers of the inherent difficulties.

From an intersectionality lens, it is unimportant and impossible to truly separate these experiences. It may be more important to honor the interconnectedness and view people as holistic beings, rather than trying to tethering these pieces apart (Salazar, 2006). Abe and colleagues suggested “the meaning of social identities cannot be fully captures as hey change with evolving contexts and relationships” (2007, p. 2). Models such as Hays (1996) ADDRESSING model suggested counselors systemically consider the following overlapping cultural influences in their lives and their client’s: (1) age and generational influences, (2) disability, (3) religion, (4) ethnicity, (5) social status, (6) sexual orientation, (7) indigenous heritage, (8) national origin, and (9) gender (Salazar, 2006). Further, concepts such as privilege and oppression may be complex and dynamic for LGBTQ international students.

An intersectionality lens suggest all identities play a part in the lived experiences of individuals, while a narrative lens would support that individuals are co-authors of these experiences. Given the socially constructed and storied nature of lived experiences, navigating the space between sexual and cultural identity is less like the stages of identity development models and more like the experience of drawing lines in the sand.

Chapter 3: Methodology

According Clandinin & Connelly (2000), “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20). Therefore, participants are storytellers in the research process. This narrative inquiry consists of two interviews, one or two journals, and participation in a private, online forum (or a second journal) as multiple data points of collection to generate a fuller story of the coming in, coming out narratives of LGBQ international students. Narrative inquiry involves collecting stories, reporting personal experiences, and ordering the meaning of those experiences (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative researchers encourage participants to describe their experiences from their lens (Patton, 2002). Narrative inquiry, in particular, describes *narrative* as both a method and the phenomenon of study (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006).

Study Design

A logic model can be found in Appendix A, showing how the study objectives, implementation, outcome, and evaluation align. Figure 6 shows the timeline of this study’s design. The circular representation of each stage of the design is meant to reflect the recursive and iterative process of data collection. Multiple levels of data collection help construct a three-dimensional narrative involving: (1) social interactions and conditions (sociality), (2) the past, present, and future continuities (temporality), and (3) the place and situation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Given the focus on cultural narratives in this study, all three commonplaces are embedded in the cultural contexts in which the LGBQ sojourner’s narratives are experienced. Learning to think narratively involves balancing the commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place (Kim, 2015).

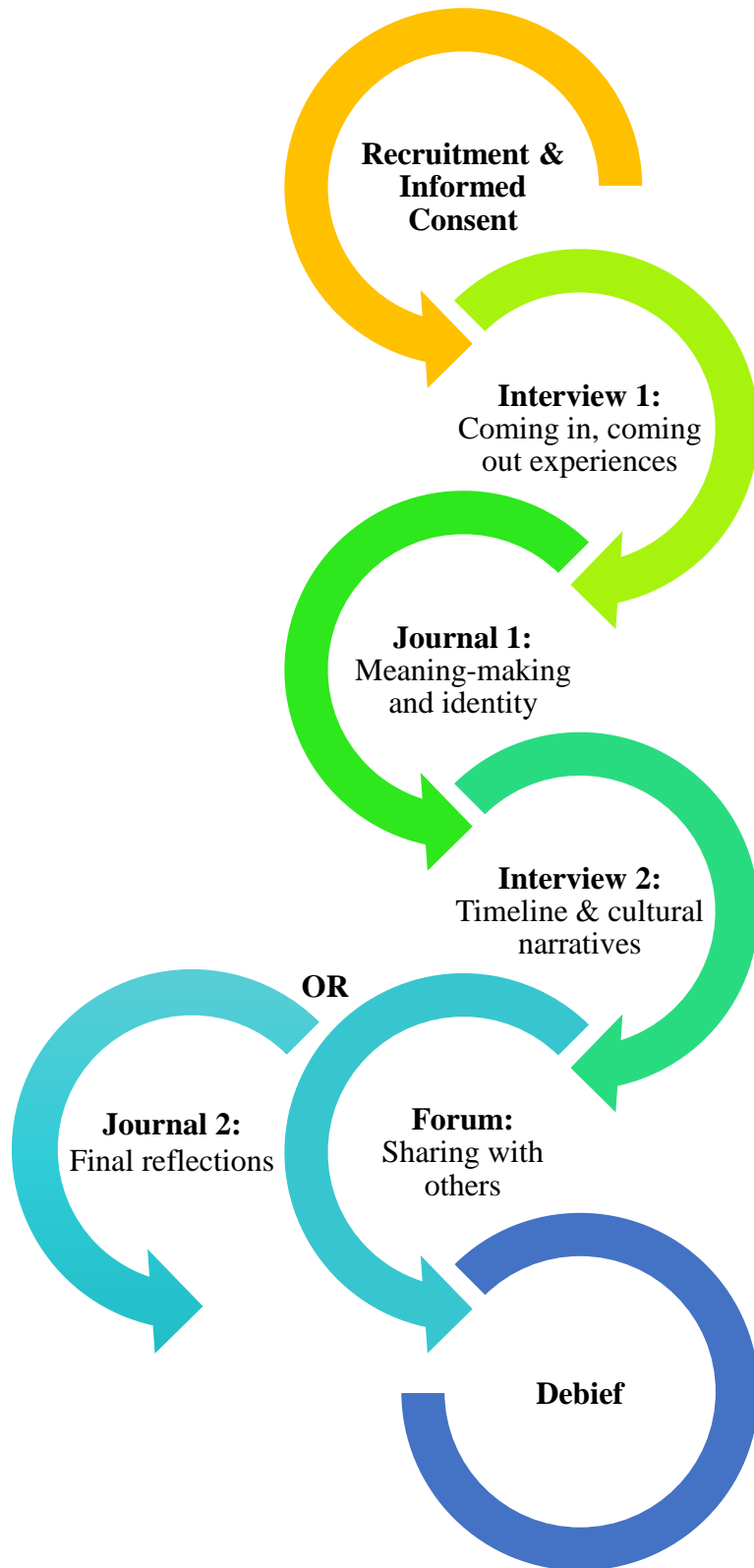


Figure 6. Timeline for study design.

Research Paradigm

This study on LGBTQ international students has been designed with Crotty's (1998) four levels of developing a research study in mind, with the addition of a fifth level that describes the methods of data analysis (see Figure 7). The process of reorganizing stories in a meaningful way is included as part of data analysis. The storyteller and narrative inquirer collects and analyzes the stories from a narrative perspective (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2000). The study design is congruent with the research paradigm in which reality and stories are constructed through the lived experiences and the process of sharing them. Narrative forms date as far back as 1500 BC; innovative ways of storytelling continue to develop, "making use of temporal sequences of lived events for a systematic and self-reflective quest of the (authentic) self" (Bamberg, 2010, p. 6).

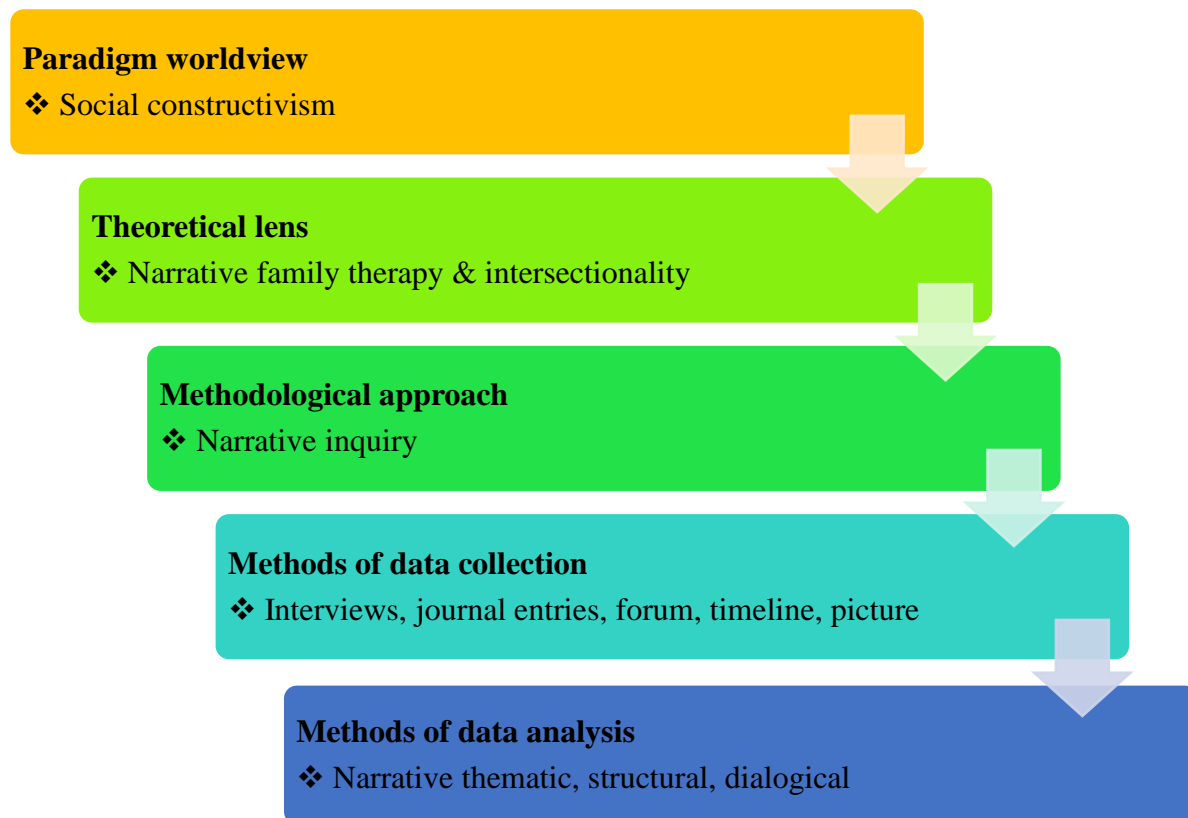


Figure 7. Five levels of research design.

Researcher as Instrument

In narrative research, researchers need to collect multi-layered information about the participant and convey an understanding of the context surrounding their lives. If participants are storytellers, the narrative inquirer is the actively contributing audience that needs to reflect on his, her, or their personal and sociocultural background. I am accountable for the lens in which I view the storytellers and tell their stories (Creswell, 2012). As an instrument in the co-construction of meaning with the storytellers, the narrative inquirer shapes the way in which narratives are told and generated. Thus, it is important for me to be reflexive about my identities and social locations, since I cannot tether from them and my values inevitably influences the storyteller's narratives. My values and worldview also influences the way I analyze the data.

One way to manage my bias is to be transparent with myself and others. I used my reflexive memos to keep recognize and acknowledge my biases. Rather than strive for objectivity, my focus is to cultivate accountability. I addressed accountability by involving the participants in my analytic thoughts during the interview process. When creating the timeline in the second interview, I used this opportunity to tentatively discuss the analytic thoughts I was forming while listening to their stories. This gave participants some space to clarify areas of my misunderstandings. They also noted any inaccuracies in the timeline and expanded on how my analytic thoughts fit or does not fit with their understanding of their story. For example, one participant regarded her professor as a significant character in her life. Since my focus was on coming out to family in the first interview, I neglected to delve into the relationship with her professor. In the second interview, I was able to ask her about the first time she met her professor, and the participant was glad to describe in detail his influence in her career and personal choices on her timeline.

A key theme of the researcher-participant relationship in narrative research is that both engage in a mutual learning experience. Both of us learn and transform during the process (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2006). For instance, after three interviews, I noticed how participants were highlighting the significance of coming to the United States for their coming out process. This prompted my curiosities about what might have happened if the participants never came to the United States. I started to ask the question, “How might your coming out process be different if you had not studied abroad in the United States?” as a follow-up question at the end of their second interview. This question generated meaningful conversation about their coming in, coming out story. As I heard their stories, we continually negotiated our relationship and its transitions throughout. In all stages, active collaboration with the storyteller was necessary to create a seamless, comfortable co-construction of their narratives (Creswell, 2012).

Sampling and Recruitment

The study required participants to identify their sexual identity as a non-heterosexual orientation (e.g. gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, and so forth). Both graduate and undergraduate international students were included, but participants must be 18 years of age or older, which is likely given the standard age range of students attending college. Interviews were conducted in English, but participants had the option of writing the journals in their native language before translating to English, if they preferred. Participants must have attended a college university in the United States for at least one semester (six months), and they must be living in the United States at the time of the interview. Participants who have graduated and returned to their country of origin were not included.

The reason for excluding participants who have returned to their country is two-fold: (a) the study then needs to address the repatriation process and its unique challenges, and (b) there

may be more difficulty minimizing the risks and safety of students, particular ones from countries where discrimination against LGBTQ individuals is institutionalized. However, participants who have graduated within the past three years and remained in the United States will be included. A study on memory recall of personal events suggested that after a year, 20 percent of critical details will be irretrievable, and after five years, 60 percent will be irretrievable (Wagenaar, 1986). However, research also shows that emotions results in stimulation in the amygdala, which enhances memory accuracy (Kensinger, 2007). Given this information, a cap of three years was deemed reasonable.

I recruited the students primarily through listservs, faculty members, student organizations, and snowballing, from multiple campuses including: University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV); Cornell University, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, and Virginia Tech (universities with LGBT international student organizations); New York University, University of Southern California, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Columbia University, and Purdue University (top five universities for international students). These universities are located in different regions of the United States in various urban and rural cities. Participants were recruited through flyers, emails, social media, (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), and word of mouth (see Appendix C). Special attention was given to the language of recruitment as different cultures may refer to sexual identities differently (e.g. homosexual is appropriate in some cultures, yet considered outdated in the United States).

Data Collection

Participants were given the informed consent (see Appendix D) in order to ensure they fit the criteria and to describe the purpose of the study and their rights as participants. After completing the informed consent and demographic survey, I emailed participants to set up their

first interview. Data collection included the following methods (see Appendix E): (a) basic demographic survey, (b) two in-depth, semi-structured interviews (90-120 minutes), (c) first journal, (d) timeline, (e) picture, and (f) one forum or a second journal. The use of different data collection methods compensates for their individual limitations and capitalizes on their individual benefits. Both demographic survey and journals were submitted via Qualtrics. Interviews were conducted with Skype or Google Chat, and recorded using a digital audio recorder for transcription. The forum was hosted on Proboards, a website that Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved as a secure site for hosting private research forums. The following section describes the primary modes of data collection.

Demographic Survey. The demographic survey covered personal information about the participants' country-of-origin, hosting university, undergraduate vs graduate status, major, age, biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural identity, religious beliefs, language, and family relationships. This questionnaire gathered preliminary contextual data on the participants. Participants were asked to list all those they considered to be family members and rate and describe their level of closeness.

First Interview. The first interview served as an initial meeting, where I gathered stories about their family, sexual, and cultural identity. I started asking about their family relationships and dynamic before and after coming in the United States, followed by questions regarding the different family members indicated in their demographic survey. This offered the participant a chance to mention other salient members that they may not have remembered to indicate before. Questions about closeness and communication were investigated. We then discussed the ongoing process of when participants first thought about their sexual identity and their experiences with disclosing or not disclosing their sexual identity to family and friends in the

United States and in their country-of-origin. The narratives collected here focused on the participant's interactions with family, friends, and significant people in their lives, how the participant experienced these interactions, and the meaning they attribute to them. Finally, I investigated how they describe their cultural identity, family culture, and cultural narratives in the United States and their country-of-origin about sexual identity. At the end of the interview, we set a second appointment time for their second interview, within one to two weeks.

First Journal. After the initial interview, I asked participants to reflect on the interview and submit their journal via an online survey link through Qualtrics. Prompts were given to guide their journaling, including questions about the cultural narratives that shape their coming in, coming out process and the experience of sharing their stories with me (see appendix E). The participants were given a week to submit their journal. Participants were encouraged to be thoughtful and elaborate in their reflection to provide thick description. The journal entry served as an artifact and another source of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2012). Journals add rigor to qualitative research (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Second Interview. The second interview involved creating their coming in, coming out timeline, where the narrative inquirer and storytellers placed the stories they have shared in a chronologically framework. The stories in the first interview were placed along a time continuum. I then asked questions that gathered more stories, other key elements in previously told stories, and shared some initial themes I noticed. Stories are often not told on a timeline, so this process facilitated connection between events that may be related to their coming in, coming out narratives (Cortazzi, 1993). This emphasis on time sequences sets narrative apart from other qualitative methods of research. The objective of the second interview was to explore their stories within the context of past, present, future, and cultural contexts. Special attention was

paid to conflicts or turning points participants may have had. The interview ended with questions about how their cultural narratives about sexual identity shifted throughout their process. Since it may be the last video contact, I debriefed and sent resources at the end of this interview (see Appendix F).

Second Journal or Forum. After the second interview, participants journaled about their experience with the timeline and seeing their narratives from a chronologically framework, new learnings or considerations, and discussed ways to support the needs of LGBTQ international students. Participants were given two options: (1) submit this journal entry as they did with the first one (within a week using an online survey link) or (2) if they feel comfortable doing so, post some of their reflections under a pseudonym in a private forum created just for participants in this study. This forum was a way of connecting the participants to a wider audience and community who are also exploring their coming in, coming out stories. Participants were given information on the risks of confidentiality of the forum and ways to minimize them. They were also given clear guidelines for interacting on the forum (e.g. respect other participants, take space make space) with an opportunity to add on or alter guidelines for their forum as a group.

Data Transcription and Storage

A research team of five undergraduate and two graduate students were trained to transcribe all interviews and audio files of my reflexive and analytic memos during the interview process to prepare for analysis. A transcription protocol and log coordinated the research team members' transcription. Team members met biweekly to discuss questions about the coding process and improve consistency across the transcriptions. The transcriptions were conducted on the computer in the researcher's office. The research team maintained the digitally-recorded audio files and all electronic data associated with the study on a secure server. All transcription,

journals, and other data files were de-identified during transcription, using the participant’s pseudonym. After each transcript was completed, I double-checked them for accuracy and removed identifying information.

Data Analysis

Riessman’s (2008) tripartite division of narrative analysis served as a guideline for conducting the narrative thematic, structural, and dialogic analyses. Narrative thematic approach focused on what was told in the storyteller’s coming in, coming out narratives, while narrative structural approach focused on how these narratives were told. Narrative dialogic approach focused on the “complex choreography” in the spaces between the storyteller, narrative inquirer, and cultural contexts (Riessman, 2008, p. 105). In the following section, I provide a detailed description of the analyses. Table 5 summarizes the analyses, their focus, and unit of analysis.

Table 5

Summary of Analytic Approaches

Informed by	Type of Analysis	Guiding Question	Focus	Unit of Analysis
Williams (1984)	Narrative thematic	<i>What is said?</i>	Content of the story	Understandings of the narratives, comprised by narrative elements
Labov (1972)	Narrative Structural	<i>How it’s said?</i>	Process of telling the story	Common structural elements across narratives
Riessman (2004)	Narrative Dialogic	<i>For what purpose?</i>	Construction of the story within culture	Storyteller’s interaction with their narratives within culture

Narrative Thematic Analysis. Using narrative thematic analysis, I identified several narrative thematic elements: (a) event, (b) characters, (c) place, (d) time, and (e) plot (Riessman, 2008). Characters included any family, friends, community, and other important members in the storyteller’s life and story. Place referred to the setting and can be as narrow as “aunt’s house”

or as broad as “the United States.” Time addressed the temporal order of the narratives by identifying when an event occurred. The actual things that occurred were coded as events. Finally, the plot referred to conflicts and turning points that moved the story along. These five elements inform a narrative. They help tell the story, as it unfolds over the course of the interview. I worked with one single interview, journal, and forum entry at a time, isolating and highlighting the narrative elements. For this analysis, I drew from the work of Williams (1984), who keeps the narratives intact. This meant that rather than coding line-by-line, I looked at excerpts that embody a narrative, identified the narrative elements (characters, place, time, event, plot), and then zoomed back in to name (coded red) the underlying understandings of the narrative (the unit of analysis). Table 6 served as a coding map for the narrative thematic analysis.

Table 6

Narrative Thematic Coding Map

Narrative Thematic Elements	Definitions	Examples from Data
Characters	Who was involved?	Jean Paul: <i>...I have my aunts and uncles and cousins...when I think about my family, I think about them</i> (Interview 1, Line 7).
Place	Where did the event take place?	Darla: <i>I moved to a different city. I moved to the capitol of...</i> (Interview 2, Line 39-40).
Time	Chronological placement	Kenji: <i>...planning on going home mid-November</i> (Interview 1, Line 529).
Event	What happened?	Aditya: <i>I remember one day I was with my girlfriend, ex-girlfriend, and uh she was like ‘I wanna meet family’</i> (Interview 1, Line 253).
Plot	Conflicts or turning points	Isabella: <i>...to hear that this one aspect of my identity is you know the biggest possible disappointment for her was pretty, pretty heavy.</i> (Interview 1, Line 66-67).

Narrative Structural Analysis. Previous research shows how narrative thematic and structural analysis reinforces one another (Riessman, 2008). While narrative thematic analysis attends to what is spoken, narrative structural analysis attends to how the story is told. Similar to the narrative thematic analysis, I worked with one single interview, journal(s), and forum entry at a time. Using Riessman's (1989) application of Labov's analytic method (1972), I coded the participants' structure and process of telling the story. I isolated and identified segments of the story based on the structural elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. The following table presents the narrative structural coding map and examples from the data.

Table 7

Narrative Structural Coding Map

Narrative Structural Elements	Definitions	Examples from Data
Abstract (AB)	Summarizes point of the narrative	Kenji: <i>...I think I started just to conform and obeyed the society's invisibility management of LGBQ community</i> (Journal 1, Line 24).
Orientation (OR)	Provides time, place, or characters	Victor: <i>That was summer break</i> (Interview 2, Line 352).
Complicating action (CA)	Describes the sequence of events, conflicts, or turning points	Ling: <i>We talked to each other all the time about everything</i> (Interview 2, Line 142-143).
Evaluation (EV)	Storyteller's commentary on complicating action	Ling: <i>I got an idea that maybe I really liked her</i> (Interview 2, Line 143).
Resolution (RE)	Resolves plot	Benjamin: <i>Once I figured that out, I'm like okay, so it is what it is, then I'm just accept it.</i> (Interview 1, Line 285)
Coda	Ends plot, returns listener to present	Yu Chen: <i>So that's the whole story</i> (Interview 2, Line 242).

As defined in Table 7, abstract is the narrative structural element that represents the storyteller summarizing the point of the narrative. Orientation refers to orienting the story in regards to time, place, or characters. Complicating action describes the telling of the event sequence, conflict, or turning point. Riessman (2008) defined evaluation as “where the narrator steps back...to comment on meaning and communicate emotions—the ‘soul’ of the narrative” (p. 84). The outcome of the plot was coded as the resolution, and ending the narrative was coded as coda. Each narrative structural element was coded using an abbreviation (listed in Table 7).

Narrative Dialogic Analysis. Narrative dialogic analysis fit well with the underlying assumptions of narrative family therapy. Both focus on the construction of story within culture and stories as embedded within larger power structures. As Riessman stated, “stories don’t fall from the sky” (p. 105). They are constructed in an interactive dance between storytellers and narrative inquirers, within their cultural contexts. They are social artifacts that tell us about culture and society as much as they tell us about the individuals’ experience. The guiding question for a narrative dialogic analysis is “for what purpose?” Specifically, culture and power structures shape the purpose of the stories. Narrative family therapists use the concepts of dominant, subjugated, and alternative stories to discuss the purpose of stories as embedded in power and culture (White & Epston, 1990).

Thus, for this narrative dialogic analysis, I used the following narrative therapy concepts as narrative dialogic elements (see Table 8): cultural narratives, dominant story, subjugated story, counter narratives, and alternative stories. Cultural narratives are defined as ways of knowing and telling that are tied to sociocultural discourses (Kim, 2016). For example, an individual may have grown up with the cultural narrative that marriage is only between a man and woman. When the cultural narrative dominates the individual’s story about themselves and

their life, the narrative can become a dominant story. A dominant story are stories about ourselves that are privileged over other possible stories, often reflecting a preferred way of behaving within a culture (Goldberg & Goldberg, 2008). Individuals who do not fit in the cultural norm, may internalize a heteronormative story that obscures other possible stories.

Carr (1998) states, “People are unconsciously recruited into the subjugation of their own lives by power practices that involve continual isolation, evaluation, and comparison” (p. 459). This subjugation is embodied in the subjugated story, the hidden stories that are rendered invisible by larger cultural norms. At times, a counter narrative may oppose the dominant story, opening space for conflict and turning points. Counter narratives are ways of knowing and telling that challenge the dominant story and pave potential paths to alternative stories. An alternative story are new stories that invite other possible storylines (Freedman & Combs, 1996). For instance, the participants in this study described other possible stories for themselves, as LGBTQ sojourners. The possible storylines opened up new ways of being for them, paths that transcend the dominant story.

These concepts describe the complex dance between personal and cultural narratives; narrative dialogic analysis allowed me to investigate the storyteller’s interaction with their narratives as they intersect with culture. Like the other two analyses, I worked with one single interview, journal, and forum entry at a time to identify and code the narrative dialogic elements. I used brackets to code the narrative dialogic elements in the transcript and to connect them to one another. These narrative dialogic elements exist only in relation to each other. For instance, a dominant story must be subjugating another story.

Table 8

Narrative Dialogic Coding Map

Narrative Dialogic Elements	Definitions	Examples from Data
Cultural narratives	Ways of telling and knowing tied to sociocultural discourses	Victor: <i>Being LGBT is still considered a taboo and people will find ways to "fix" you.</i> (Journal 1, Line 6-7).
Dominant story	Stories about ourselves that are privileged over other possible stories; often reflect preferred ways of being in culture	Kenji: <i>So me being gay, it affect my family also; that's how I was raised... cause I'm going to be the disgrace of the family.</i> (Interview 1, Line 502-503).
Subjugated story	Hidden stories rendered invisible by cultural norms and standards	Kenji: <i>As long as I did what people expect to be or do, I thought I would be ok and kept silencing and ignoring the uncomfortable feeling of being incongruent and sadness of not being able to connect with others as who I really am.</i> (Journal 1, Line 26-28).
Counter narratives	Ways of telling and knowing that opposes the dominant story	Kenji: <i>...instead of seeing me as different she was helping me understand being unique.</i> (Interview 2, Line 174-175).
Alternative story	New stories that invite alternative possibilities; often expand how we define ourselves	Huang: <i>But the good thing for me is that I can escape from such pressure and fly to the US for further discovering myself. I see different culture, minds, and people, all of which encourage me to live as a unique individual...</i> (Journal 1, Line 50-52).

Coding Process

Altogether, structural, thematic, and dialogic analysis reinforced one another to provide a fuller picture. After the transcripts were complete, I listened to the audio files to double-check for accuracy. I then immersed myself in the transcriptions, which included the interviews, journal entries, and forum entry. Repeated readings encouraged me to notice moments of conflict and moments that reflect the storyteller's complex sociocultural history. Repeated

readings also allowed me to attend to the multiple voices and multiplicities of identity in the storytelling, a concept referred to as polyphony (Kim, 2016).

Constructing Narrative Accounts. After completing the analyses for each participant's story, I reconstructed narrative accounts of their coming in, coming out story. I weaved narrative thematic, structural, and dialogic elements in telling their stories. Rather than presenting the analyses separately in my findings, they are represented holistically as a narrative account. Keeping the analytic findings intact is necessary to construct narrative meaning, given that narratives are context-specific and cannot be analyzed in isolation (Kim, 2016).

Analytic memos written during the interview and coding process informed my writing of the narrative accounts. I used the analytic memos as trails to other paths of narrative meaning and beginning threads that captured pieces of the storyteller's narratives that were unfolding in our interaction. To demonstrate the process of coding and constructing the narrative account, Appendix G presents an example of the coding process with segments from one coded transcript, excerpts from the associated narrative account, and analytic memos that pieced together the participant's experience to construct the narrative account. By weaving in three methods of analysis, the narrative accounts provide thick description of the story's content, process, and construction within cultural context.

Moving from Story to Story. As I moved from story to story, I repeat the same coding process, using the coding map for each story to maintain continuity. I continued writing analytic and reflexive memos, noticing when familiar patterns and connections from one story connected to the next. Rather than avoid contaminating the ideas of one story to the next, I used memos to notice and acknowledge these connections. Memos written during the analysis process informed the final level of analysis, where I collectively analyzed the stories.

Shared Narrative Meaning. When collectively analyzing the stories, I looked across the narrative accounts for shared narrative meaning. Shared narrative meaning are the common threads among the stories (Clandinin, 2013). I zoomed back in, rereading each narrative account, and laid them side-by-side to identify recurrent threads. What narratives emerged in each of the accounts? What resonated across the storyteller's experiences? From there, I drew connections between the stories. Clandinin (2013) referred to these threads as *resonances* or *echoes* across the data. Figure 8 depicts the coding process as pyramid between the various levels of analysis. The initial coding consisted of the narrative thematic, structural, and dialogic analyses, followed by constructing narrative accounts that interweaves the analyses. Finally, the final analysis identified connections and narrative meaning across the narrative accounts.

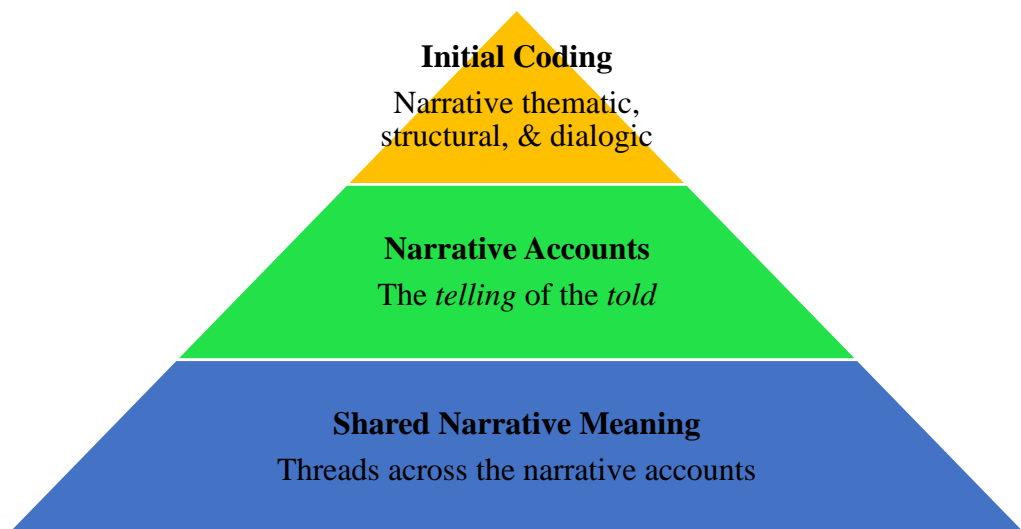


Figure 8. Three levels of analysis.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Various means can be used to build rigor and trustworthiness. Trustworthiness involves building credibility, transferability, and dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Credibility is the extent to which the findings can be trusted, the extent to which the findings are considered credible research. Dependability refers to the consistency between data and results, and

transferability is a means to evaluate how relatable or transferable the findings are to the experiences of others who fit in the population of interest. There are many strategies for building trustworthiness, such as triangulation, memos, and reflexivity. Table 9 lists the methods of improving credibility, dependability, and transferability used in this study.

Table 9

Building Trustworthiness

	Credibility	Dependability	Transferability
Definition	How can the findings be trusted	How can the results be consistent with the data	How can the findings relate to others' experiences
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Researcher's training • Community informants • Prolonged engagement • Reflexivity • Triangulation of data collection and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit trail and documentation of analytic and reflexive responses in memos • Narrative coherence • Triangulation of data collection and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposive sampling • Thick description of the social, temporal, & cultural context of each participant's experience • Triangulation of data collection and analysis

Triangulation. Multiple forms of data collection provided triangulation of narrative data including the: interview, journal, and forum. Different data sources were collected at different points in time, through different means, and analyzed using different approaches. From a constructivist paradigm, triangulation of data collection and data analyses contribute to understanding the data in a more reliable way by attending to the diverse social construction of realities. It also fits with the narrative inquiry concept of polyphony that privileges multiple interpretations and voices within the data (Kim, 2016). Triangulation is a common way to increase credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Researcher's Training. My training helped me conduct the interviews, which improves the project's credibility. I was trained to interview individuals about the decision-making process of disclosing sexual orientation to family members. This, paired with my training as a

narrative family therapist, provided me with the skills to develop researcher-participant relationships, construct useful follow-up questions, think narratively, and gauge the risks and vulnerability that participants experience in the research process.

Community Informants. AcrossBorders@VT members who identify as part of the community of interest served as informants, but are not participants in the study. Before beginning the study, I presented the interview questions to members of AcrossBorders@VT and asked them to check the language of the interviews for inclusivity and cultural sensitivity. This panel of informants included three international students from India, South Korea, and Guyana. One critical piece of this process was learning, from the informants, how to take language into account when interviewing and having the maneuverability to ask questions differently, based on the participant's cultural context.

Prolonged Engagement. Prolonged engagement in the group of interest establishes a relationship of trust between researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My interaction with the actual participants spanned between 2 to 6 months. All of the participants indicated interest in a follow-up interview in the future. I remain in contact with a few participants, although there could have been more prolonged engagement with each participant. Narrative inquiry is deeply ethical work, and thinking narratively is also thinking relationally. Clandinin (2013) suggests that narrative inquirers become a part of the landscapes they study. Informed by this idea, I see this project as my start to become more socially responsible to the LGBT international community and their social issues.

Reflexivity. The design of this study was shaped by my experience of starting a LGBTQ+ international student group called AcrossBorders@VT. An international student and I worked on this initiative, as part of the Queer Graduates, Professionals, and Allies on-campus student

organization. Therefore, this study is informed by the stories of AcrossBorders@VT members and our interactions. Through my interactions with the group, I explored my own biases, privilege, and oppression. I hold multiple positions of privilege, as an able-bodied, young, and highly-educated U.S. citizen. I am also an instructor, clinical supervisor, therapist, and researcher, all of which are social locations that embody tremendous power and privilege. Thus, I need to remain cognizant of my privileges and hold myself accountable for my part in the relationship with participants, by remaining reflexive and taking relational responsibility.

Audit Trail and Memos. In addition to these strategies, audit trail and documentation of reflexive and analytic responses in the form of memos improved dependability and consistency of the data (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993). Selected examples of analytic and reflexive memos are in Appendix H and Appendix I, respectively. I wrote my first memos while writing the dissertation proposal during the research design phase, which captured how experiences with AcrossBorders@VT informed the study design. During the interview process, I audio-recorded my memos, which were later transcribed. During analysis, I continued writing memos to guide my analyses. Maintaining audio files, transcripts, Qualtrics data, timeline data, and pictures was also a part of constructing an audit trail. Careful documentation of the data storage and transcription process contributed to a dependable audit trail.

Narrative Coherence. Clandinin (2013) also discussed narrative coherence, which refers to how much the narratives makes sense in context and the overall unity of the story. Seeking coherence is a part of experiencing life, though coherence may seem impossible at times. As a narrative inquirer, I try to hold space for both successful and unsuccessful attempts toward narrative coherence, and resist the urge to always smooth rough edges around the stories in the narrative accounts (Clandinin, 2013). Many of the stories shared during the interview

process are secret stories, unspoken in some of the participants' most intimate relationships. The sharing of secret stories in itself can enhance narrative coherence (Riessman, 2008).

Sampling and Thick Description. Purposive sampling focused on recruiting LGBTQ sojourners to establish transferability. In the future, focusing on international students from particular countries and cultures would further improve this aspect. Thick descriptions in the narrative accounts also establish transferability. In addition, transparency and detailed description of the methods improve the trustworthiness of the study.

Quality of the Study's Significance. Trustworthiness is improved when the findings produce information that is useful and important. Clanindin (2013) suggests personal, practical, and social justifications to be the guide for answering the "so what?" and "who cares?" questions in a narrative inquiry. Personal justifications require the researcher to situate narrative inquiry in their own experiences, conflicts, and struggles. I recognize that my personal justification stem from wanting to explore the stories of sojourners, longing for home in the context of belongingness, safety, and acceptance. My own experience of existing in-between cultural and sexual binaries sparked my curiosity in the stories of people who travel between cultural, sexual, and gender norms.

Practical justifications address the possibilities for LGBTQ sojourners in this study to unpack their experiences and generate narrative meaning by telling stories often overlooked. I hoped that the practical justifications planted a seed for the participants to continue sharing their stories with others in their lives. A few of the participants discussed the potential of contributing in their own way. Some wanted to raise awareness of LGBT issues in their country, start international LGBT groups in the United States, connect with other LGBT international students, or simply, share with their family and friends. Finally, the social justifications of the study

emphasize new theoretical and methodological justifications as well as social action. Integrating narrative family therapy concepts with narrative inquiry, particularly for the dialogic analysis, open possibilities for bridging clinical and research approaches. Both approaches promote the values of inclusion and equity. I further address social justifications in the implications section of this dissertation.

Rationale for Methodology

As the methodology for this study, narrative inquiry created a space for the coming in and coming out stories of LGBTQ international students to travel from person to person. Clandinin (2013) calls this process *world-travelling*. Though complex, narrative inquiry was a transformative approach. Given that the purpose of this study is to explore the cultural narratives and disclosure experiences of LGBTQ international students, this methodological approach enabled me to:

- Use the metaphor of story to explore the storytellers' holistic experiences.
- Involve the storytellers and future audiences in a personal way.
- Account for multiple stories and the intersectionality of social identities.
- Evoke vividness and aspects of life in meaningful ways.
- Expand the story meaning from an individual's experience to a collective witnessing.
- Explore the telling of stories as bounded within systems of power and domination.

Limitations of Methodology

Narrative inquiry may be limited in its transferability, more so than other methods such as phenomenology and grounded theory because of its focus on the individual's narrative rather than wider application to others in the same population of interest. Another limitation is that language and cultural barriers may influence the process of telling and interpreting the stories. It

may also influence the participants' ability and comfort level of conveying intimate details through conversation or journaling. On the researcher end, it may impact my ability to understand the meaning conveyed by the participant. My values and experiences inevitably mold the conversation and analysis. Issues arising in the researcher-participant relationship are more likely to negatively shape the process if they remain unresolved.

The use of Skype and audio recording also limits our understanding of nonverbal cues and subtle ebbs in the conversation that is in of itself a form of data. Misunderstandings may be more likely to occur in conversations in video chat than in person. It may also have reduced the sense of intimacy and personable quality of the interview given the technological medium. While cultural narratives are considered in this study, one important limitation was the lack of exploration in particular ethnicities and cultures. The rationale for this is that with international students, I focused on their process of transitioning from one culture to another rather than focusing on their specific aspects that define their culture-of-origin. In addition, the focus on sexual and cultural identities meant that the intersection of other social identities may have missed or minimized.

Ethical Considerations

During the initial stage of informed consent, I described the study purpose and procedures to participants, stating that they can withdraw from the study at any point with no consequences. The researcher needs to address inherent power in their relationship at the beginning of the study and approach with a one-down position, highlighting the participant's expertise in their own lives. Another ethical consideration is the safety of the participant, particularly ones from countries in which non-heterosexual identities are criminalized and punished. Managing confidentiality is important to manage these risks. Further, I provided a list

of resources to participants for psychological needs and social support, but I acknowledge that the physical distance between researcher and participant may limit the number of the resources I can provide that is local and accessible to the participant.

Use of technology required researcher and participant to negotiate additional steps for maintaining confidentiality (e.g. finding a time and place when the participant will not be interrupted or disturbed, clearing internet history or using private browsing settings when accessing the survey links and the Proboards forum). Correspondence between participants and researcher was managed through email (CICOstories@gmail.com) and skype name CICOstories, which only the researcher accessed. I conducted the video interview when I am alone in a private setting and protecting recorded data on a secure laptop only I can access. The laptop is kept in the locked office of the researcher. At the end of the project, the data will be kept for three years before being destroyed. Pseudonyms were used on all audio files and transcripts. Research assistants handling the transcription process of the data were trained and instructed to follow the same safety procedures as the primary investigator.

Participants were given two amazon gift cards totaling up to \$50 in value. After the first interview and submission of the journal through Qualtrics, the researcher sent the first \$15 gift card directly to the participant's email, without revealing the participant's involvement in the study. After completion of the second interview, participants were compensated the second \$35 gift card. By sending amazon gift cards via email, it allowed for clear documentation that the participants received their compensation.

Ethical Decision-Making Guide

The American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) code of ethics (2013) served as the ethical rules guiding my ethics as a research in the field. AAMFT's code of

ethics principle V discusses the researcher's responsibility to their participants, stating that "Investigators respect the dignity and protect the welfare of research participants, and are aware of applicable laws, regulations, and professional standards governing the conduct of research" (p. 73). I respect my participants, work to protect their confidentiality, and minimize the risk of harm. I also attend to the values of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, fidelity, and justice (Zygmong & Boorhem, 1989). I respect my participants' right to exercise their autonomy by their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw at any point of the study. I also tried to maximize the benefits of their participation by providing a space for them to process their complex experiences without repercussions. I believe these conversations between researcher and participant may benefit them in helping them reflect on their experiences.

Kitchener's model of ethical-decision making served as a guide for both the intuitive and critical-evaluative level of ethical rationale (Zygmong & Boorhem, 1989). I found it useful to be attentive to the intuitive level that I feel when encountering an ethical dilemma, but I also find it useful to complement intuitive justification with critical-evaluative level accounts for ethical rules, principles, and theory (Zygmong & Boorhem, 1989). These hierarchical tiers of ethical reasoning allowed me to critically evaluate the potential consequences of my decisions as a researcher. Relational ethics also guides my ethical decision-making. I aim to embody a caring reflexivity, which involves reflexivity of one's biases, power, and privileges, in addition to a caring humility that honors the participants' stories (Rallis & Rossman, 2010).

Chapter 4: Findings

Out of 17 prospective participants who viewed and signed the consent form, three people did not schedule the first interview and two people only completed the first interview.

Consequently, a total of 12 LGBTQ international students participated (completion rate of 70.6%).

Participant Demographics

Eight of the participants were men (66.7%), and four were women (33.3%). They identified as gay ($n = 8$, 66.7%), followed by bisexual ($n = 2$, 16.7%), pansexual ($n = 1$, 8.3%), and not sure ($n = 1$, 8.3%). The four women identified as bisexual, pansexual, or unsure, and all men identified as gay. The age distribution ranged from the ages of 20 to 34 (see Table 10).

Table 10

Demographics

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<u>Gender</u>		
Women	4	33.3
Men	8	66.7
<u>Age</u>		
20-24	3	25.0
25-29	5	41.7
30-34	4	33.3
<u>Sexual Orientation</u>		
Gay	8	66.7
Bisexual	2	16.7
Pansexual	1	8.3
Not sure	1	8.3
<u>Religion or Spirituality</u>		
Atheist	5	41.7
None	3	25.0
Buddhist	2	16.7
Catholic	1	8.3
No Answer	1	8.3
<u>Relationship Status</u>		
Single	7	58.3
Dating	3	25.0
Married	1	8.3
In a Serious Relationship	1	8.3

Eight of the participants either regarded themselves as being atheist or not associating with any religion (66.7%), although two participants were Buddhist (16.7%), and one was Catholic (8.3%). Seven participants were single at the time of the interview (58.3%), three were dating (25.0%), one was married (8.3%), and one was in a serious relationship (8.3%). Eight of the students were graduate students (66.7%) with one having already graduated (8.3%). Eight of them attended universities in cities with a population of more than 50,000 people (66.7%). Their chosen degrees varied from hospitality to biology to family therapy (see Table 11).

Table 11

Student Status and Study in the United States

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<u>Student Status</u>		
Graduate	8	66.7
Undergraduate	3	25.0
Graduated in past year	1	8.3
<u>Number of Years in the U.S.</u>		
1 – 2	2	16.7
3 – 4	5	41.6
5 – 6	2	16.7
7 – 8	2	16.7
9 – 10	0	0.0
11 – 12	1	8.3
<u>Population of University Location</u>		
More than 100,000	8	66.7
50,000 to 100,000	1	8.3
Less than 50,000	3	35.0
<u>Area of Study</u>		
Hospitality	3	25.0
Economics	1	8.3
Education	1	8.3
Education Policy	1	8.3
Computer Engineering	1	8.3
Communications & Media	1	8.3
Criminal Justice	1	8.3
Biology	1	8.3
Marriage and Family Therapy	1	8.3
No Answer	1	8.3

Table 12

Culture, Race, and Languages

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
<u>Country of Birth</u>		
China	5	41.7
India	1	8.3
Japan	1	8.3
Vietnam	1	8.3
Chile	1	8.3
United Kingdom	1	8.3
Czech Republic	1	8.3
Bulgaria	1	8.3
<u>Racial Identity</u>		
Asian	7	58.3
White/Caucasian	3	25.0
South American	1	8.3
Chinese	1	8.3
<u>Cultural Identity</u>		
Chinese	4	33.3
Asian	1	8.3
British-Dutch	1	8.3
Chilean	1	8.3
European	1	8.3
Indian	1	8.3
Japanese	1	8.3
Bulgarian/Third Culture Kid	1	8.3
None	1	8.3
<u>Primary Language</u>		
Chinese	3	25.0
Mandarin	2	6.7
English	2	6.7
Spanish	1	8.3
Czech	1	8.3
Vietnamese	1	8.3
Bulgarian	1	8.3
Japanese	1	8.3
<u>Other Spoken Languages*</u>		
English	7	53.8
Cantonese	2	15.4
Taiwanese	1	7.7
Hindi	1	7.7
Spanish	1	7.7
Dutch	1	7.7

*Note: Percent of spoken languages calculated based on total number of languages, not number of participants.

As seen in Table 12, five participants identified China as their country of birth. The remaining participants came from India, Japan, Vietnam, Chile, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, and Bulgaria. Most of the students identified racially as Asian (7, 58.3%), while three identified as White/Caucasian (25.0%), one as Chinese (8.3%), and one as South American (8.3%). Their cultural identity was more varied. One participant specified and discussed her identification as a third culture kid, while another participant did not identify with any cultural identity, describing himself as a nomad.

In the survey data on family members, peers (including friends, roommates, and cohort members) and mothers were most commonly listed, followed by fathers (see Table 13). While participants described parental roles, unconditional love, bonding, and admiration as aspects of their closeness to mothers and fathers, feelings of support, trust, and happiness were identified as aspects of the closeness in peer relations. Advisors and instructors provided friendship and mentorship for three of the participants, tied with sisters and maternal grandmothers. On average, the closest relationships were ones with advisors and with romantic partners, but this is not representative of the sample, given that only one participant was married and only three identified advisors as being family members to them.

Grandmothers, particularly on the maternal side, were involved in caregiving, family drama, and passed down cultural values and teachings to the participants. The two maternal aunts identified in this sample were trusted with secrets and regarded as both peers and mentors. One participant regarded the host mom in the United States as being a fairly close relationship, having shared characteristics or interests was a frequent description of closeness across all relationships.

Table 13

Family and Closeness

Family members	<i>n</i>	%	Average Closeness (scaled 1 – 6)	Description of Closeness and Relationship
Peers (e.g. friends, roommate, cohort)	8	20.5	5.5	Mutual admiration, trust, support, feelings of happiness, miss them
Mother	8	20.5	4.8	Genetics, mom role, love, bonding, understanding, selfless, caring, kind, can be judgmental, shared interests, unconditional support
Father	7	17.9	3.9	Genetic, dad role, love, close to my heart, admiration, shared characteristics, disagree on social issues, unconditional support
Advisor/Instructors	3	7.7	6.0	Advisor, mentor, friendship
Maternal Grandmother	3	7.7	4.0	Provides peace and calmness, caregiving, cheerleader, taught cultural values, involved in family drama
Maternal Aunt	2	5.1	5.0	Shared interests, open- mindedness, trust with secrets, mentor, peer, cheerleader
Sister	2	5.1	4.5	Sister role, difficult history
Brother	2	5.1	4.0	Support, mutual respect, trust
Husband	1	2.6	6.0	Husband, best friend
Cousin	1	2.6	5.0	Shared characteristics, like a sister to me
Host mom	1	2.6	5.0	Host mom
Paternal Grandmother	1	2.6	4.0	Love, caregiving, involved in family drama
Total	39	100		

Narrative Accounts and Subthemes

Across six months, I talked with twelve participants from different countries, universities, and regions. The following are their narrative accounts and selected subthemes, which captured my hearing and the narrative analysis of their stories. The narrative accounts are a culmination of the narrative thematic, structural, and dialogic analyses. They present a more holistic representation of the data through the use of storytelling and interweaving the coded elements. Quotes from the participants' are cited as such: (Interview/Journal/Forum #, Line #).

Several subthemes emerged from the thematic, structural, and dialogic analyses for the participants. In their coming in, coming out process, the participants valued independent thinking, being true to one self, being accepted as their holistic selves, being attuned to their inner feelings and wishes, striving for personal happiness, and maintaining their close family relationships. These subthemes reflected the participants' considerations for their relationship to self and to others. Participants also described several turning points that either presented alternative stories or provided counter narratives to limiting and oppressive dominant stories. For example, some turning points involved seeking information on their own through the internet, movies, research, or class. Meeting successful models of LGBQ individuals and couples were also regarded as significant turning points for the sojourners. Some sojourners reflected on how important it was to have models of success that represented them culturally, not just white, gay men. Along the way, supportive friends, family, teachers, and members of the LGBQ community helped them find acceptance, though many of the students still struggle.

In their struggle, the students reflected on the possibilities for leading a happy, meaningful life as an LGBQ sojourner. Some acknowledged the privileges they had in other ways, such as being white or male. Some students engaged with others in the LGBT community

to find support and better understand LGBTQ identities and relationships. Through the timeline, they identified how their needs differed depending on the time, place, and context of their coming in, coming out process. Some preferred private ways to receive support and others emphasized outward engagement in public settings. The following tables show examples from the data for selected subthemes in each participants' narrative account, across the three approaches to analysis.

Auxy's Story. Auxy was my very first participant. He started our conversation, describing his family and positioning his parents as upper middle class, educated psychologists. He provided this context to explain the underlying reasons for his interest in participating in this study and how much he valued psychological research. Auxy often gave the background for each character in his life before each story he tells. In doing this, he consistently situated them in their social locations. Growing up, Auxy did not feel unusual or different. At the age of three, his parents separated and have been separated for 17-18 years. He lived mostly with his mother in England, while his dad lived in the Netherlands. Family was defined by genetics. Auxy believed in the desire of parents to see their children succeed so they can extend their genetic material. His relationships to his parents displayed little to no negative aspects on his life, though a deep connection was not present. When I asked him to describe the communication with his parents, Auxy laughed and said:

It'd be like having a conversation between Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud. It's very sterile. Pleasant. But you know, it's just pleasantries I suppose. It's not lots of joking, no deep connection, stuff like that. My folks aren't really into that kind of, uh, touchy feely stuff that you find in America a lot (Interview 1, Line 117-123).

He later followed up with some nuances between his father's Dutch background, which he considered to be more emotionally expressive, in comparison to his mother's British background. As a British-Dutch person, Auxe did not enjoy the cultural characteristic of being uptight. He expressed how he feels this is changing as he stays in the United States, and he was working on being more laid back. Auxe wanted to strive for a balance that worked best for him. Recently, Auxe was growing closer to his cousin, who he considered to be a sister.

While his cousin shared her struggles with him, Auxe generally dealt with his struggles alone. He shared how self-conscious he felt when discussing his feelings: *—and I know it's absolutely stupid, but it's a very heteronormative thing to think* (Interview 1, Line 100). He continued to describe recognizing the limitations of gender roles, though they still shaped his comfort with discussing feelings. Auxe explained the importance of independence in his family, and generally, in his culture. He elaborated, *I think the culture kind of gears you towards being independent, and thinking for yourself. That's just how I grew up I suppose* (Interview 1, Line 50-51). In comparing the UK culture with that of the US, Auxe perceived those in his culture as receiving more opportunities to be independent at a much younger age. He criticized group thinking and the mindless absorption of social media, where people do not use their ability to be critical consumers of what they hear.

Group thinking was something that Auxe felt very strongly about as he highlighted in several times. He stated, *So many people just don't think critically on their own. And that's something I just absolutely hate. I hate closemindedness* (Interview 1, Line 354-356). Auxe felt strongly against bigotry, and he felt that people should worry about themselves. Auxe attributed group thinking to genocide and the history of terrible things happening, *That's what happens in history when people are not able to think independently. And group thinking comes together,*

and then, thousands if not hundreds of thousands of people die. (Interview 1, Line 539-541).

Given the dangers of group thinking, Auxe felt that people need to open up their mind and think for themselves for the future of everyone else.

In Auxe's experience, being gay or bisexual was commonplace in his culture, and thus, he discussed never thinking that it was unusual or wrong. This level of acceptance was evidenced in the unnecessary of coming out, as he recalled never having to tell his parents. His parents knew from seeing him with his partners, but as Kinsey scale kind of people, they were not surprised and did not seem to care. In this moment of the conversation, Auxe provided further context by comparing the experiences of gay people in big cities versus small cities. Overall, he regarded England as being a generally safe, sexually-fluid place, but recognized that this was not the case for everyone in England, depending on the city and region they lived in.

When unpacking how Auxe experienced the cultural narratives and dominant story around sexual orientation, he reflected on the interaction between social identities, *A lot of the people that are really bigoted are also really quit racist. I find that being a white male that I'm not confronted about being you know, gay or being bisexual, or being genderqueer, or something like* (Interview 1, Line 370-373). Auxe had a dry humor and often laughed when he pondered on how terrible bigotry was. At the same time, Auxe emitted a general sense of hope. Rather than drawing a picture in the second interview, Auxe wrote a poem about his experiences. On the forum, he posted: *I was able to write a poem about the experience which made me reflect on how meaningful it is to be in a period of history where LGBTQ issues are being explored and evaluated more seriously* (Forum, Line 3-4). His advice to other LGBTQ international students was: *Always be true to yourself above all else!* (Forum, Line 7).

Auxy believed that American universities should create more opportunities for engagement through student organizations and events. He felt the international student club at his university was devoid of structure and meaningful interaction. Auxy desired independent thinking and education for everyone. This, he stated, would make the world a better place. Auxy valued how the world was improving and looked forward to future progress. He described how everyone had their own wishes, dreams, and goals, and how in its essence and entirety, a human life was its own universe (see Table 14).

Table 14

Selected Subthemes from Auxy

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Auxy	<p>Success as independent thinking, being true to self, and one’s wishes:</p> <p><i>In an ideal world, I think everyone should be educated and be able to think independently for themselves you know? (Interview 1, 531-532)</i></p> <p><i>A human life is its own universe, you know? Every person has their own wishes, their own (Interview 2, 576-577).</i></p>	<p>Situated himself and others in social locations:</p> <p><i>My folks, they're, uh, I suppose, upper middle class, educated psychologists (Interview 1, 1).</i></p> <p>Commentary on social media as discouraging independent thinking:</p> <p><i>My whole philosophy is like think for yourself, you know? I think so many people are, just have no opinions of their own. You know, and are consumed by media... (Interview 1, 350-352).</i></p>	<p>White, male privilege buffered oppressive cultural narratives:</p> <p><i>I definitely say that I feel I've experienced like white male privilege in regards to being openly gay (Interview 1, 386).</i></p>

In these selected subthemes, Auxy did not necessitate coming out to others as being an important. Instead, he emphasized thinking independently and staying true to one’s wishes. In

regards to his structural analysis, he often commented on how social media discouraged independent thinking. He also situated people in their social locations of class, education, and race. This ties in the dialogic analysis of his story where he recognized how white, male privilege buffer some of the stressors of being openly gay. His emphasis on attaining education in the thematic analysis ties in with how he positions himself and his parents as well-educated, independent thinkers in the structural analysis.

Yu Chen's Story. Yu Chen described a small family, of her dad and mom, full of love and harmony. Throughout her growing up experience, there is a protective aspect to her not communicating the pressures and struggles she experience with her family, *I don't want them to worry about me uh about my life here I just want them to feel that everything is very well with me* (Interview 1, Line 43-44). She described pressures from school, but she would not disclose the pressure to them, so that they do not worry. Before coming to the United States, Yu Chen received her master's degree in China. It was hard for her and her family when she studied her master's degree in China at a big city far away from them. For the six months she had been in the United States, this distance was even sadder. At the time of the interview, she was still settling into the United States, having been there a little over a semester. Her parents were supportive, though they missed her.

She described a supportive relationship with her family, one of a mutual care, love, and respect. While she cared about her parents feelings, Yu Chen showcased a firm passion for doing what she felt was right and pursuing her goals and dreams. Her passions were inspired, in part, by a professor in China. She told the story of attending this professor's lecture and the avid inspiration and admiration she felt about the purity of his passion in research. Yu Chen also described her passion of wanting to improve things for other people through her career in public

affairs. This conflicted with her parent's perspectives and their desires for her to achieve job security. In one example, she described how her parents may be feeling about her decision to study abroad, *Maybe they cannot understand because they are not in such an environment everyone is so passionate about improving other's life* (Interview 1, Line 57-58). This passion was again reflected in her relationship with her professor, who is an important role model in her life. She described him as a passionate individual in his pursuit of science and research, who focused on success and the betterment of society, rather than money and fame. He had also been an incredible source of support for Yu Chen's passion and studying in the United States. Her own passion was to help children in less-developed regions gain access to education.

One aspect of Yu Chen's cultural identity was not thinking about her cultural identity as much, until she came to the United States. The noticing of her cultural identity enhanced after she arrived, when she began encountering cultural differences. For instance, she described how people in the United States were more talkative, frank, and interested in sharing their feelings, in comparison to China, where people did not share so many things easily with each other. This experience made it difficult for Yu Chen to know when friendships were truly genuine and close in the United States. Further in the conversation, Yu Chen described previous times she noticed the nuances within her culture: *My mom is more traditional than my dad... [her] cultural identity is stronger* (Interview 1, Line 322-325).

In addition to culture, generational differences also factored into the level of acceptance towards various sexual orientations in her culture. While the younger generation in her culture cared less, the older generation felt that it is unacceptable. She attributed this acceptance to the growing information and access via technology that allowed younger generations to learn about various sexual identities. Yu Chen expressed that homosexuality was hard to believe and accept

in China, but seemed to be more common in the United States. She described the U.S. culture as being more open and accepting. However, Yu Chen noted that people from both cultures may lack understanding if they themselves did not belong in the LGBTQ group.

In 2014, Yu Chen talked to her best friend about her sexuality for the first time. Her understanding of her sexual identity started from a younger age, a gradual experience of exploring and listening to her inner feelings. Without using labels, she described her feelings of being more attracted to the girls around her and wanting to spend time with them. Guided by these feelings, Yu Chen described her beliefs, *I think people should respect their feelings. Concepts or views from others are just from others, but you are the one who has to live with yourself so that's why I feel it is more important* (Interview 2, Line 198-200). When asked whether it was more, less, or equally important for her to feel accepted by others or feel comfortable with her feelings, Yu Chen talked about how her feelings mattered more. She called it her *living attitude* (Interview 2, Line 196). This echoed her advice to others, *I would suggest other LGBTQ students first figure out how their feelings or orientation have formed, try to talk to more people in the LGBTQ group, and thus help make themselves feel less uncomfortable with their orientation* (Journal 2, Line 9-11).

Yu Chen used the word normal when describing her experiences. In a general sense, she described feeling normal as a Chinese person in her country, and therefore not noticing her cultural identity as much. In regards to her sexual feelings, she highlighted that it is her feelings also felt normal, *It's not the information [about sexual orientation] that makes me feel it's normal. I think it's my personal feelings that make me feel it's normal* (Interview 1, Line 263-264). In this sense, Yu Chen trusted her inner experience, though she was not very comfortable with her sexual identity (see Table 15).

Table 15

Selected Subthemes from Yu Chen

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Yu Chen	<p>Success as respect for and attunement with inner feelings:</p> <p><i>I think people should respect their feelings. Concepts or views from others are just from others, but you are the one who has to live with yourself so that's why I feel it is more important (Interview 2, 198-200).</i></p> <p><i>I would suggest other LGBQ students first figure out how their feelings or orientation have formed, try to talk to more people in the LGBQ group, and thus help make themselves feel less uncomfortable with their orientation (Journal 2, 9-11).</i></p>	<p>Passion for helping others in the way her story was told:</p> <p><i>They would just feel after graduation I get a secure job and get enough income, that would be... good enough, but that's not just what I want! I want more (Interview 1, 54-56).</i></p> <p>Commentary on access to internet and information:</p> <p><i>Traditionally, the older generation did not have many access to the internet. Maybe less contact with this information made it harder to accept. (Interview 1, 253-256).</i></p>	<p>Using education to help others equity:</p> <p><i>On the other aspect, I want to start an organization with my friends, to help more people especially in developing countries to have the access to education (Interview 1, 381-382).</i></p> <p>Accepting inner feelings constructs normalcy:</p> <p><i>Create more opportunities for the LGBQ students to gather and share their feelings, thus they probably will feel more normal about themselves as they belong to a group (Journal 1, 19-20).</i></p>

Yu Chen highlighted being attuned to one's own feelings. Although she noted how access to information helped younger generations accept LGBQ identities, for her, it was about recognizing her inner feelings. The emerging ideas about inner feelings from the thematic analysis connected to the dialogic aspect of normalcy and sexual orientation. Sharing and accepting inner feelings would create alternative stories of normalcy and belongingness. The structural analysis demonstrated how her passion motivated her to come to the United States and supported the goal of promoting education equity in one of her dialogic themes.

Ling's Story. Ling was born in a multicultural northern region of China, where the culture was not traditionally Chinese and had been mutually influenced by nearby foreign cultures, such as Russian and Japanese. She then moved to southern region in China, close to Hong Kong. She gave a rich history of her cultural experiences and the way location shaped her experience. Ling stated, *even in the same country, there may be different kinds of cultures* (Interview 1, Line 190). Ling described some common characteristics of Chinese culture as valuing work and family. Sexual orientation was not something that people commonly communicate about. Since families were close-knit, there was less privacy, and thus, disclosing anything person to one person was riskier. In contrast, U.S. culture emphasized individual needs and wants.

Ling came from a family of three. Her mother and father were both college professors, and though they were not emotionally close, Ling felt comfortable and happy near them. She did not talk as often with aunts, grandparents, and other family members and described their relationship as being distant. Her parents had given her the freedom to travel by herself, as much as she wanted. For Ling, it was important to rely on herself to pay for her travels and schooling.

It was in middle school that Ling started to notice her feelings toward her female friends. In the school setting, students were expected to focus on their schoolwork, so even thinking about such things like relationships and sexual identity were discouraged. In school, boys and girls were separated, which made it easier for Ling to spend time with and grow close to her female friend. In middle school, Ling noticed the feelings she had towards her friend, *But I didn't have any thoughts of 'I am a homosexual' and at that time decide. I actually had no idea what that mean or that it could be an option* (Interview 2, Line 145-146).

As they grew closer in high school, Ling told stories of feeling like she wanted to protect her friend, give her advice, and spend time and share everything with her. In addition, she felt a self-responsibility to emotionally protect her. Ling identified the significance of those feelings, and how they felt be different from friendships. She expressed, *I feel that it is very strange, like it's supposed to be between a real boyfriend to a girlfriend* (Interview 2, Line 162-163). The pressures of school made it difficult to devote time to fully explore her feelings and sexual identity. In retrospect, she felt it was depressing that people could not openly talk about these feelings in Chinese culture. She described the abrupt shift from not expressing their feelings to getting married, *When you're a student in school, they just tell you not to think about this, but suddenly when you're at this certain age, they urge you to jump into a relationship or jump into marriage* (Interview 1, Line 161-165). Usually the pressure to get married revolved around age, and the idea that marriage followed after the completion of their academics.

Ling talked about the pressures of society and the subjugated story about sexual orientation, *People won't accept, even your parents, your family won't accept you thinking about this as a student, a middle school student. So all of that is secret, underneath the table. It's very different from (laughs) the culture here* (Interview 1, Line 140-144). In keeping this secret, Ling would not directly disclose her sexual identity, but tested the waters with someone she knew by asking about their opinion on LGBT issues or their perspective on same-sex relationships.

It was not until being in the United States in one of the big cities that Ling started identifying as bisexual. At that time, she got to know a lesbian friend and a group of Chinese students who identified of a different sexual orientation. This group used the labels P, T, and H, to distinguish subcategories of being a pretty girl (p), tomboy (t), or both (H). Ling saw herself as having both aspects of masculinity and femininity. She also started to see sexual identity not

as a mental illness, but a natural feeling. Around that time, Ling asked her parents indirectly about their beliefs. Her parents believed sexual orientation was a mental illness and that gay people needed help.

Since her arrival in the United States five years ago, Ling had been navigating her closeness to her family and culture. In addition, having lived in three different locations in the United States, she was attuned to the cultural differences, noticing how she had shifted in her own cultural identity and beliefs. Ling experienced cultural tensions from being influenced somewhat by the U.S. culture, *I feel the Chinese way of thinking is more conservative. Like for Western culture, it's more open, open-minded, open to express themselves, open to say things, and open to disagree* (Interview 1, Line 53-55). This cultural tension surfaced when she discussed the process of disclosing her sexual identity. She had many factors to consider, such as finding a job and finding a relationship. She considered the potential of having to hide her feelings if she returned to China. She considered getting married and having a family to maintain a public image.

Though she felt more open to discuss sexuality in the United States, Ling noted the influence of specific regions and cities. Ling had lived in multiple cities in the United States in the Midwest and Southeast. The various levels of openness in the United States was confusing initially. When she first entered the United States, people in a large Midwestern city were open to talk about and accept different sexual orientations, whereas the small community in the South where she currently resided felt less open and riskier. Some factors that played a role in feeling a heightened risk involved being a smaller, more religious, and family-oriented city. Privacy was a recurring concern for Ling. In her suggestions to address the needs of LGBTQ students, she highlighted the concerns about their privacy and ways that LGBTQ groups around campus can

maintain privacy, in their posters and advertising. She also emphasized the need for more information and conversations about sexual orientation in the mass media, TV shows, and so on. She elaborated on how the lack of LGBT visibility in China in comparison to the United States:

In China, people do not talk about LGBQ in public or in any public formation. There is almost no chance to talk to people about this topic. In U.S., I feel this topic is commonly considered in mass media, especially recent years. However, because of the religion, people in certain area have strong negative opinion about this (Journal 1, Line 8-11).

Table 16

Selected Subthemes from Ling

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Ling	<p>Success in travelling and financial independence:</p> <p><i>I really did not want to ask money from them [her parents] or add any burden to them, and when I graduate from college, I decided to go outside to see the world, so I applied for a scholarship, and that's basically my financial support during my stay in the United States</i> (Interview 1, Line 24-27).</p> <p>Protecting privacy:</p> <p><i>A lot of international students may have concern about the privacy, especially within this small community.</i> (Journal 1, 20-21).</p>	<p>Turning point of considering disclosure:</p> <p><i>I think if I stay in U.S. I will be more than fifty percent to disclose because I feel this is more open, but if I choose to go back after graduation, I-I don't think I am going to disclose</i> (Interview 1, 260-261).</p> <p><i>I did not have any plans to disclose my story back in China. After coming to the U.S. the influence of the culture makes me start to think of disclosing it one day. This is a very important change for me</i> (Journal 1, 15-17).</p>	<p>Seeking understanding and acceptance:</p> <p><i>People won't accept, even your parents, your family won't accept you thinking about this as a student, a middle school student. So all of that is secret, underneath the table. It's very different from</i> (laughs) <i>the culture here</i> (Interview 1, 140-144).</p> <p><i>I think every LGBQ international student endures 'double' challenges: coming from both being LGBQ and being an international student. Therefore, it is important to find a right way to express themselves and seek understanding</i> (Journal 2, 10-12).</p>

In these selected subthemes, Ling talked about wanting to attain financial independence and traveling on her own. Ling first came to the United States to be with her boyfriend at the time. In retrospect, she wondered about the complications they had in communication. Then, she struggled with pretending to be someone different to make him happy. Currently, Ling continued to walk the line of weighing her own capacity to be authentic versus wanting to stay silent or pretend. She thoughtfully considered the aspect of place when negotiating whether or not to disclose her sexual identity. Even considering it was a turning point for Ling. When she was in China, Ling did not have any plans to disclose her sexual identity. Through the process of being in the United States, she started to think of disclosing her sexual identity to others. The dialogic subtheme of seeking understanding and acceptance tied in with her wanting acceptance and understanding in her disclosure process, while privacy remained a concern.

Huang's Story. Huang was a single child in his family. He grew up with his grandfather and grandmother until he was seven, before moving with his parents. This contributed to some distance between him and his parents growing up. However, he grew to love and respect them. He described a warm closeness with them, as well as good relationships with aunts, uncles, and cousins. Huang described their love for him and how they often shared advice for life and school with him. While they talked about many things, Huang could not share his sexual identity with them because they could not understand what being gay meant, stating, *In their world, there is no gay stuff* (Interview 1, Line 37). He attributed some of this to the light use of technology and internet in their generation. Huang was often reflective in his stories, pausing and zooming out to give the overall meaning of the story. Without much prompting, he showed how reflective he was in the way he told his stories.

In the younger generation, Huang stated that some considered being gay as a normal, while others disowned the act. Most were more exposed to the information accessible online, which made it easier to understand and accept gayness. Huang described the influence of society in this regards, *Sometimes you cannot know how you identify...your identification of yourself is not just about yourself. It's also about society, the environment, and whether you got resources to help you discover yourself* (Interview 1, Line 324-326). He was aware and reflective of the socially-constructed nature of identity.

Huang noted the absence of LGBQ individuals, couples, and families in mainstream media in China. The concept of LGBQ was distant for the older generation (those born before 1990). Huang elaborated, *They [the older generation] consider LGBQ as rare as E.T., and laugh at or feel disgusted of LGBQ people due to their ignorance. LGBQ people are labeled as morally corrupt, abnormal, and perverted* (Journal 1, Line 19-21). In high school, Huang realized he was not straight. He suspected it to be a disease, perhaps a feeling that could be cured. He searched for a professional online to cure his disease, but could not find anyone. In the end, he kept it a secret for a decade, before disclosing to a female friend. His friend was understanding, open, and accepting, which made Huang feel more comfortable though he continued to struggle with it. Huang developed feelings for a male friend, *At that time, I feel it's not normal. I feel it's abnormal so I just tried to suppress this feeling* (Interview 1, Line 166-167). Two years later, he went to college and started thinking more about his sexual orientation. He conveyed the desire to be normal, *I don't want to be gay, you know. I just want to be normal so I tried to make some girlfriends and try to pretend that I am not gay* (Interview 1, Line 172-173). Huang detailed this struggle with accepting himself and trying to convince himself that he is straight.

As he began to accept the truth of the matter, Huang did not want to out himself because he could not predict what might happen and how his family would respond. He did not know what he might lose. For him, family relationships in China was marked by closeness and parental influence in their children's lives. In addition, Chinese society placed responsibility on the children to respect their parents. Gossiping in the workplace and community made it harder to keep a private life and increased fear of judgement about the gay person and their family. Huang stated, *So all of this social pressure in China makes it even more difficult to be ourselves* (Interview 1, Line 105). At times, Huang felt angry in response to the immense social pressure. Other times, he thought about going back to China to live with his family, whom he loved. Repeatedly, he talked about his love for his family, and although he struggled with the sexuality aspect, he wanted to maintain his family relationships.

After another four years in college of struggling with self-acceptance and trying to date women, Huang described a turning point. Right before coming to the United States, he met a gay couple with a very good relationship. Huang describe their relationship with excitement, *They are kind of a model to me. I mean they love each other, love love each other* (Interview 1, Line 184-185). He explained that he did not accept himself to be gay because all the images of gay people were negative, that they had AIDS and could not maintain long term relationships. He spoke with the gay couple and discovered that, *Yes, they live very happy. They don't do anything bad to other people, and they are very positive and kind people, very, uh, sweet to others, very nice to other people* (Interview 1, Line 189-191).

This was an important turning point in Huang's story, as the happy, gay couple presented a counter narrative to the disease-ridden dominant story of being gay. The counter narrative sparked some potential alternative stories about himself and his ability to accept himself. Huang

continued, *At that time, I think, yeah, I can be one of them, and to be true to myself meanwhile be nice to other people* (Interview 1, Line 192-193). Getting the PhD provided a path to enter a free country where Huang could be himself. He described the offer to study in the United States as a journey for discovering himself. Once he came to the United States, he gradually started to accept himself helped along by what he described as, *a channel of information to understand how the gay world, how people live and are alive* (Interview 1, Line 200). Huang looked forward to a future of not pretending to be straight and accepting himself.

When discussing Chinese or East Asian culture, Huang described family as the most important aspect of his cultural narrative. He valued his relationships with them. He looked forward to creating his own family and completing his degree. By being in the United States, Huang started to think more about what was important to him individually, rather than try to cater to other people's expectations for his life. This challenged cultural notions and standards of what is right or wrong. He was unfolding his own path to happiness, *I don't want to be someone else, to please other people around me. I just want to be myself* (Interview 1, Line 313-314). He described a Dutch song about a boy and his two fathers. This song about a gay couple adopting a boy greatly influenced Huang. He elaborated on the song, *The boy is proud of his fathers, you know, and he doesn't feel shame or difference from other children* (Interview 1, Line 337-338).

Though Huang did not talk much to others about his sexual orientation, he was a researcher in his own way, finding movies that presented gay relationships in a different light. Indulging in these movies helped him express his emotions vicariously. As an introverted person, the movies became an outlet for his stress. I noticed how often the movies he described was about the importance of family and relationships. It was not just about seeing gay people as

healthy individuals, but also as people who could create and maintain meaningful family relationships. Huang journaled:

It [same-sex relations] would be a huge shame to that family. Therefore, most gay people are forced into unhappy marriage with straight people, burying their secrets deep down. The best is that some gay men and lesbian women will marry each other just to make their parents feel better. They do not live together and have their own life partners. It is a compromise between their own happiness and social pressure (Journal 1, Line 29-33).

From a cultural perspective, LGBTQ stories in China were more about their social impact on families, while in the United States, the fight centered on religion and homophobia. While Chinese people tolerated LGBTQ colleagues and acquaintances, it was a larger conflict in families and specifically for parents with gay children.

While he described his process as a tough time of self-acceptance, Huang also recognized that his family love and care about him. Huang identified two feelings about his process: *regret* and *courage*. He regretted the time spent trying to deceive himself. At the same time, he recognized his courage for finally facing his true self, facing the pains he had, and finding a way out, *I am proud of myself. The process is long and suffering, but I manage to survive. I still do not know what life will be like in future, but it is moving to a positive direction (Journal 1, Line 10-12)*. Huang began an alternative story, *I see many possibilities to live a wanted life without hurting other people (Journal 1, Line 52-53)*. He advised others to follow their heart and stay true to themselves. One aspect he highlighted was how being able to travel helped him further discover himself and how encountering different cultures, ideas, and people played a role in his process of learning.

Table 17

Selected Subthemes from Huang

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Huang	<p>The importance of social context and resources:</p> <p><i>Sometimes you cannot know how you identify...your identification of yourself is not just about yourself. It's also about society, the environment, and whether you got resources to help you discover yourself (Interview 1, 324-326).</i></p> <p><i>...a channel of information to understand how the gay world, how people live and are alive (Interview 1, 200).</i></p>	<p>Turning point of meeting a happy gay couple:</p> <p><i>They are kind of a model to me. I mean they love each other, love love each other (Interview 1, 184-185).</i></p> <p><i>Yes, they live very happy. They don't do anything bad to other people, and they are very positive and kind people, very, uh, sweet to others, very nice to other people (Interview 1, 189-191).</i></p> <p><i>At that time, I think, yeah, I can be one of them, and to be true to myself meanwhile be nice to other people (Interview 1, 192-193).</i></p>	<p>Cultural narrative about LGBTQ people:</p> <p><i>LGBTQ people are labeled as morally corrupt, abnormal, and perverted (Journal 1, 19-21).</i></p> <p>Alternative story of living as an LGBTQ sojourner:</p> <p><i>But the good thing for me is that I can escape from such pressure and fly to the US for further discovering myself. I see different culture, minds, and people, all of which encourage me to live as a unique individual... (Journal 1, 50-52).</i></p>

Huang was able to gain access to these resources through the internet and also travelling to the United States. Change in social context and access to resources helped him begin to create an alternative story that encouraged him to live as a unique individual. The development of this path to uniqueness involved being able to connect in different cultures with different minds and people. It is within context and relationships that Huang pieces together a new storyline that opposes the dominant story of LGBTQ people as morally corrupt and abnormal. Meeting a happy, kind gay couples in China was an important turning point in his experience.

Jean Paul's Story. Jean Paul was born on a rainy day, and rainy days were rare and few in-between in Chile, making it a kind of special occurrence at his birth. With a liver issue, he stayed longer at the hospital as baby before being deemed healthy enough to go home. His parent held busy work schedules, a lifestyle they maintained until he was in the 9th grade. His grandmother played a role in taking care of him. Jean Paul's stories were detailed with context and his feelings. His father—a retired, air force veteran from a conservative family in the countryside. His mother—a patient, calm, quiet, and conservative teacher. His sister—a lively engineer with a love for dancing and folk music, just like him. His grandmother pretty much raised him and was overprotective of young Jean Paul. These were his closest family members, though he had aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Since kindergarten, Jean Paul had been thinking about his sexual orientation. In the magazines his mother used to sell, he would notice the men instead of the women. As he pondered on the idea that he liked men, he also thought at that very moment about the risk of making his parents unhappy. During high school, Jean Paul dated girls to see if he could have a relationship with women and so that his parents would not think he's gay. Growing up, he made sure he did not act in a feminine way around his parents and others. He did not want others to associate him with gay stereotypes and assume his sexual orientation. He knew he was gay from liking a neighbor, but he never felt that being gay was a bad thing.

In the eleventh grade, his father approached him as friend and told Jean Paul that he could tell him anything. However, Jean Paul was afraid to disclose his sexual orientation to him. This contributed to a distance between him and his parents. Their parent-child relationships was a traditional relationship, one not laced with the affect and outward I-love-you's that Jean Paul described of U.S. American parents and children. His family raised him and his sister to be

independent. Jean Paul described feeling closer to his sister because of being in the same generation, and in addition, only his sister knew that he was gay. They kept each other's secrets, *We both say, let's say this to my father, let's say this to my mother. So we cover each other's backs* (Interview 1, Line 72-74). He sometimes acted as a mediator between his sister and parents and protected her. Jean Paul often considered what his parents thought, *I feel limited because I cannot act or say things...that they wouldn't like* (Interview 1, Line 98). He discussed the importance of their support, both economically and relationally. He could not afford to lose these forms of support. For emotional support, Jean Paul kept to himself. He would discuss issues of identity with a few close friends.

Though Jean Paul was raised Catholic, he never thought he would go to hell or that God would not help him. Being gay was not something abnormal to him, *I always say it as something natural, not a choice. It's something you were born* (Interview 1, Line 238-239). What concerned Jean Paul was making his family suffer. Jean Paul re-emphasized his thoughts about his parents, *It was always thinking about them, and not thinking about me. Because I'm the only son, and it's also thinking about their conservative background* (Interview 1, Line 185-187). Jean Paul wondered if he might have been able to talk to his parents about his sexual identity if they were not as conservative. The pressure of bearing children as the only male child was a recurring plot in Jean Paul's experience.

In stories about bringing one his boyfriend home for Christmas and family dinners, Jean Paul introduced his boyfriend as someone he met at the gym. He thought about his mother's reactions, *I noticed that my mom was uncomfortable because I felt that she was feeling something, but she never said anything* (Interview 1, Line 318-319). Though he suspected his discomfort, this was not openly discussed. In his second journal, he recalled another important

event we did not delve into when creating his timeline. In this event, one of the boys Jean Paul was romantically involved with wrote love letters to another boy, stating that Jean Paul meant nothing to him. These letters were found by the director of their dance group, who spoke to Jean Paul about the letters. Soon after, someone in charge at the dance group spoke to his mother. After the meeting that night, his mother was more upset than sad. She did not speak to him all the way back home, and his father suggested that they take him to a therapist.

Jean Paul realized, *After thinking, I believe it wasn't because of my age, but because of the gay situation. I think this was the first concrete time when my parents had to face this gay issue* (Interview 2, Line 25-27). Another incident occurred when Jean Paul was dating his third boyfriend, the mother of an ex-friend told Jean Paul's father about his relationships with men. His parents asked his sister, but she denied it out of protection for him. Soon after, in a conversation between Jean Paul and his father, he denied what his ex-friend's mother stated and reassured his father. He was not ready to come to his parents then, *Personally, I think it was THE moment to come out. However, I was scared. I was still living with them and didn't want to lose any kind of financial support* (Journal 2, Line 43-45).

In a big city on the West region of the United States, Jean Paul was beginning to feel more comfortable in the five years he studied abroad. He considered the city he entered to be a good place to be gay, *You can walk on the street holding hands and go into restaurants, and everything is normal here. I think during that time and during that relationships, I was able to openly be out to myself and the community here* (Interview 1, Line 263-265). However, the Chilean community was a bit harder for Jean Paul to be open with, given a more conservative range of beliefs. He depicted this in his picture about the process of coming in and coming out, (see Figure 9). He showed himself growing more and more out of his bubble of secrecy. Now,

he drew himself with a clipboard, *The person with a clipboard is the one in charge* (Interview 2, Line 776).

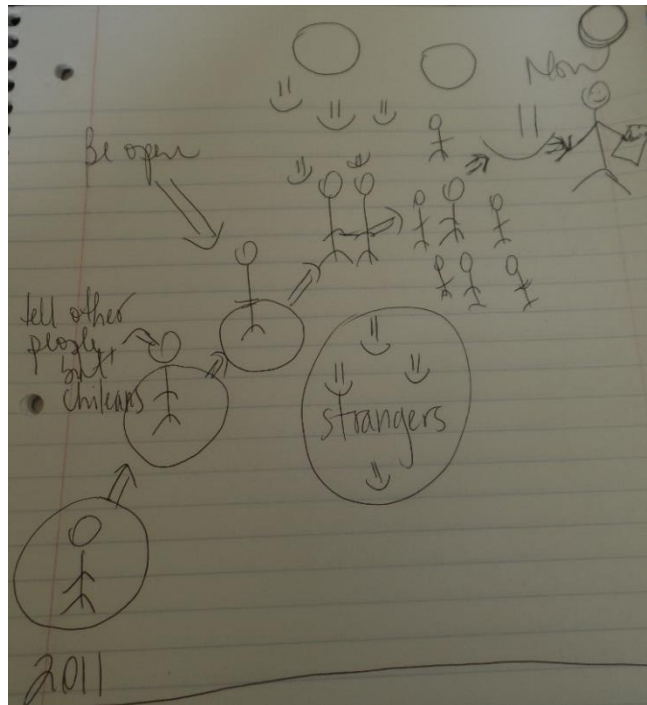


Figure 9. Jean Paul's picture.

In describing his culture, Jean Paul gave an intersectional description of being raised conservative and in a disciplined, military-oriented family. His mother's occupation as a teacher played a role in the family structure and order. He also noted important differences between being Latino and Chilean, *Whenever people ask me, 'are you Latino?' No. I am not Latino. I'm Chilean. I don't feel Latino. 'Are you Hispanic?' No. I'm Chilean* (Interview 1, Line 388-390). Jean Paul talked about being and feeling very Chilean, yet being adaptable to other cultures. His cultural identity was also shaped by the history of the country. He told me about the history of Chile in the 1970s, during the reign of a military group and the rule of dictator. Many people died. Many disappeared. His parents were a part of the history, though Jean Paul had never asked them about their specific involvement. However, this history shaped Jean Paul's cultural identity. In regards to religion, Jean Paul pray, as a Catholic, every night before going to sleep,

but he also believed in karma and energies. He described being more in-between and open with his religious beliefs.

Jean Paul felt that sexual orientation was a normal, natural feeling, but his concern about hurting his family and others played a role in not coming out. He described a personal conflict about the family issue:

I personally once thought, 'Oh maybe, I could have girlfriend, or maybe I could have a wife, and with a wife, have a good family.' I think about it. And I could get a beautiful, good wife, but I would make her unhappy (Interview 1, Line 455-458).

Not hurting his parents and others was something that Jean Paul often considered. To protect his family, he kept his personal life separate from them. He never talked about his parents publically. He would never post their pictures on Facebook. At work, Jean Paul stayed separate, rarely discussing his personal life. These efforts placed his family and work in a separate container, away from his sexual identity and personal life. After having good and bad dating experiences and multiple long-distance relationships, Jean Paul felt dating had been a growing up experience. While he suffered from low self-esteem before, he started to go to the gym and worked on making himself feel good. This was a part of him discovering himself and what he was looking for in a relationship. Those who were privileged enough to know more about his journey were the few he trusted. The city and location he currently studied in played a major role. After many years of being in the United States, Jean Paul recognized how many states were still not even close to being LGBTQ-friendly:

Also, I am impressed by the power of religion that has over the political and everyday decisions that affect this community. I think of my country, Chile, and even though it is a

very Catholic society, religion does not play a strong role as in some places here (Journal 1, Line 21-23).

Though it was still challenging to come out in the United States, Jean Paul pondered on if he had not studied abroad, *I think I would still be more in the closet over there [in Chile]. I would still be hiding, and I would still not be involved or I wouldn't perhaps know when to look for somebody* (Interview 2, Line 655-656). Jean Paul described studying abroad as a moment to rethink who you are and the role of your loved ones in your process. For those going back to their countries, it would be important to see who could support them in their culture.

Table 18

Selected Subthemes from Jean Paul

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Jean Paul	<p>Thinking about his parents:</p> <p><i>It's always thinking about my parents. And when I was in high school, my mother used to teach at the same school, so I always wanted to behave well</i> (Interview 1, 170-172).</p> <p><i>I feel limited because I cannot act or say things...that they wouldn't like</i> (Interview 1, Line 98).</p>	<p>Reflection on self-discovery:</p> <p><i>I think at this moment of my life I am discovering myself</i> (Journal 1, 2-3).</p> <p><i>I would tell them that if you are abroad, forget about your cultural restrictions and explore what the other part of the world has to offer you. This is the opportunity to explore yourself and let yourself be free for at least 5 minutes</i> (Journal 2, 58-60).</p>	<p>Being able to be open and show others true self:</p> <p><i>You can walk on the street holding hands and go into restaurants, and everything is normal here. I think during that time and during that relationships, I was able to openly be out to myself and the community here</i> (Interview 1, 263-265).</p> <p><i>Why would I want to be with someone to show others something that I am not? I'm not going to even hurt myself, I'm going to hurting her... I don't want to hurt anybody</i> (Interview 1, 459-461).</p>

Jean Paul was always thinking of his parents as he was growing up, and much of this was situated in a conservative, structured, and disciplined family. This subtheme in the thematic analysis shaped how Jean Paul was beginning to discover himself and his wants and needs, in relationship to his parents and what they wanted. In the structural analysis, the subtheme of self-discovery and exploration was a turning point in Jean Paul's narrative. The dialogic analysis highlighted how he was able to be openly out to the community in the United States, and refuse to marry a woman just to hide his sexual orientation.

Benjamin's Story. Benjamin was a dynamic storyteller, full of spirit and energy. He described a close relationship with his parents. After working in the military for almost 30 years, his father resigned and currently worked in government. His mother was in international business. In the United States, Benjamin has a close relationship with his cousin who is studying biostatistics. He also considered his professors to be family members. His master's advisor was his American mom, though she was originally from Germany. He thought of two other professors as big brothers or big sisters. He shared his happiness and sorrows with them.

At the age of 13 or 14, Benjamin noticed his feelings toward some men. He described feeling his heart beat faster and excitement. He had difficulty feeling this with girls, although most of his friend were girls at that time, and he spent much of his time with his female friends. Though his mother was very open about everything else, she was not as open about sexual orientation. Looking to the internet, Benjamin learned many things about LGBTQ identities. With this research and information, it did not take him long to accept his sexual identity. He felt that he had been unique in some way, even in being more individualistic than collectivist. At a young age, he would stand up to the teacher.

In a similar vein, he described his response to his sexual orientation, *I have been growing up, behavior like I'm kind of different than my other peers in terms of sexual identity. It did take me a very short, quick time to accept that* (Interview 1, Line 301-303). In regards to coming out, many of Benjamin's friends and peers knew even when he was in China. Some were okay while others' responses were implicitly negatively. When Benjamin came out to his parents in 2012, his mother cried for a few days, and his father suggested that Benjamin focused on his academics. He considered his coming out conversation with his parents to be the most serious one. Since his move to the United States, Benjamin felt closer to his parents, and took their advice in consideration. Now living in the United States, he trusted his parents as experts of living. They gave him feedback on doing things like driving and cooking.

His parents protected Benjamin when others ask about whether or not he had a girlfriend or when he planned to get married, *You know, a PhD takes a lot of work to do, and he may not have much time to worry about that* [dating and forming a family] (Interview 1, Line 190-191). Part of their response was also not wanting to enter an awkward conversation with family relatives. Benjamin acknowledged that they were the ones who had to put up with the situation. Since he was not physically in China, he felt his parents had to deal with the stress and social pressures more directly. He explained how they are suffering, so he supported their strategies for not disclosing to their relatives. Parent-child relationships in China differed from American culture, *In my culture, I owe them* [parents]. *It's true, like I owe them so much, and I don't want to give them too much pressure and unnecessary stress* (Interview 2, Line 207-209). Benjamin was grateful for the emotional and financial support from his parents. Benjamin told stories about families being subjugated, when parents who accept their gay child were silenced or

ostracized by their friends and social group. He contextualized his response, *I guess my culture make me care about my parents' reactions* (Interview 1, Line 215-216).

Benjamin embodied a cultural pride in this cultural identity. Being in the United States, in some ways, have strengthened his pride in being Chinese, *I was not that connected to my roots, but now I feel like I'm very connected to my roots* (Interview 2, Line 47-48). These roots ran deep in his father's tie with the military and his mother's background in a classic Chinese family. Benjamin described the tensions between his culture, academic success, and sexual orientation:

I think my culture makes them [my parents] proud of me because of my academic achievements, and if my sexual identity comes out, that would definitely destroy their proudness and people would judge that, more openly than they do in American culture (Interview 1, Line 224-226).

While sexual identity was not openly discussed in his family, Benjamin was able to come out to his professors and friends in the United States. After coming to the United States, Benjamin would disclose his sexual identity if people asked, and consequently, many of his friends who are international students had also disclosed their sexual orientation. His American mom happened to be the faculty advisor of an LGBT student organization on campus, so telling her helped him feel more accepted and comfortable. Later on, Benjamin took over this LGBT student organization for almost two years. The organization also catered to professional development for LGBT individuals and allocated funding for students to attend global LGBT conferences. It trained him to be leader and gave him an opportunity to support others. It also paved the way for other accomplishments Benjamin described, *I was selected as a*

commencement speaker, and in my commencement speech, I mention I'm from this community (Interview 2, Line 230-231).

Benjamin was kind enough to send me a copy of his speech and the YouTube link for it. He highlighted, *It's really powerful because my university is very diverse. That's why I start from my point of view as an individual from the LGBT community* (Interview 2, Line 251-252). Benjamin incorporated the term LGBT, instead of gay, into his commencement speech, to be more inclusive and also to protect his parents. He explained that Chinese people like his parent may know the term gay or lesbian, but would be less familiar with LGBT. Benjamin received many awards and honors. He talked about how this success was what he focused on, rather than seeing his sexual identity as something that restrained his achievements.

Table 19

Selected Subthemes from Benjamin

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Benjamin	<p>Caring about his parent's reactions:</p> <p><i>In my culture, I owe them [parents]. It's true, like I owe them so much, and I don't want to give them too much pressure and unnecessary stress</i> (Interview 2, 207-209).</p> <p><i>I guess my culture make me care about my parents' reactions</i> (Interview 1, 215-216).</p>	<p>Commentary on access to internet and information:</p> <p><i>Once I figured that out, I'm like okay, so it is what it is, then I'm just accept it.</i> (Interview 1, 285)</p> <p><i>I have been growing up, behavior like I'm kind of different than my other peers in terms of sexual identity. It did take me a very short, quick time to accept that</i> (Interview 1, 301-303).</p>	<p>Success in community and university:</p> <p><i>To be honest, I think the best decision I have made since I came to America is take over that organization</i> (Interview 2, 215-216).</p> <p><i>To our university, everybody you know, no matter who you are, where you come from, you will still be appreciated by your difference</i> (Interview 2, 254-255).</p>

Benjamin cared about his parents' reactions, appreciated all they have given him, and wanted to maintain his relationship with them. He accepted his sexual orientation quickly after accessing information on the internet and embracing differentness. This juxtaposed with his care for his parents' reactions, since sexual identity was something he accepted, but was a more uncertain topic for his family. The dialogic analysis showed how Benjamin was not only resourceful, but he also became a resource for others by leading an LGBT organization and highlighting the success story of an LGBQ international student in his commencement speech. A snippet of his commencement speech highlights his struggle and the importance of university support:

It is not easy to be a foreigner at a school, and it is even harder to be an Asian male from the LGBT community. But this campus provided so much support to let me feel secure and happy about who I am. This diverse campus cares about each individual and cherishes differences between individuals...Thank you, [university name], for making us happy about who we are (Benjamin's Commencement Speech).

Darla's Story. Though reluctant at first, Darla quickly warmed up to the idea of talking to a complete stranger about her story. She considered herself to be a private person, and did not feel the need to look to others for validation. While her parents were still together, their relationship was complicated. She described how they never got along well and were off and on. At times, they separated and did not speak. Her older sister and Darla were working on their relationship and repairing past issues. Darla had a close relationship with her mother, whom she tells everything. She had more difficulty reading her dad, but their relationship was good, given the circumstances of his personality. She talked often with her father, though not sharing the personal stories with him like she does with her mother.

At the age of 14 or 15, Darla began thinking about her sexual orientation. As a kid who overthought everything—breakfast, life issues, everything—Darla started thinking about how she liked boys, but she also appreciated beauty in everyone. Around the age of 16, she gave it some serious thought. She went to gay clubs with her female friend who had a gay brother and started to question her sexuality more. Going to a gay club was fun, and non-threatening for a women versus the normal club where being groped was more of a risk. Darla described the environment of the gay club as being accepting and open. In her family, sexual orientation was not discussed, but also not a big deal. Darla talked about her thoughts on sexual identity, *I don't like labels so my view is that we're all human and you fall in love with a person, not gender* (Interview, 1, Line 238-239). Darla also described being independent. She felt comfortable in life and did not need as much guidance from her parents. She also felt that her parents trusted her abilities. She described how financial dependence shaped her boundaries and relationships with her parents. After finishing her master's degree and going home before she started her PhD abroad, Darla began drawing boundaries with her father. Darla did not attribute these family patterns to culture. Rather, they were specific to her family relationships.

Growing up, Darla did not encounter cultural issues against LGBT people. However, she considered how small villages may be different and more difficult than big cities. In bigger cities, people might be more open because they were used to see more life in action. Most of her friends have been accepting of her sexual orientation, and some respond positively to it. Darla only shared these intimate details with her friends. Given the intimate nature of her sexual life, Darla was not interested or considered it important to talk about it with her parents.

Darla identified as being from Czech Republic, given the shared history and features of her personality. In some ways, she shifted more to the middle, *I always say I'm too mean for*

American, but too nice for people from my nationality (Interview 1, Line 371-372). She described how people from her country might appear rude and closed off, while Americans were more likely to engage in small talk. Another difference she identified was how conservative U.S. Americans were, especially with religion:

There's a lot of conservatism. That comes together with religion, you know? So with religion, it's like people are not supposed to be gay because God didn't intended it that way. There are a lot of conservative values that I feel Americans have. They are specific for Americans (Interview 1, Line 419-423).

In contrast, being LGBT was not an issue for most people in central Europe. In discussing more about her cultural identity, Darla reflected on her family and cultural values, *Especially since I moved to America, and I have very little connection to other people from my country here, made me realize how much I miss my country, and how proud I am to be who I am* (Journal 1, Line 11-13). Darla compared the view of the Eastern side of the world as being more oppressive than the United States. This was not surprising to Darla, given stories about Russia prosecuting people based on their sexuality. However, not many stories are told about Czech Republic, and the general public did not often distinguished between individual countries. Darla challenged the view of the United States as an extremely free and accepting country, *Nonetheless, I watched the movie "Bully" a couple of years ago, and the American youth was portrayed as unforgiving and vicious towards the LGBQ community* (Journal 1, Line 24-26).

Between Czech Republic and the United States, Darla noted that in both of those cases, the dichotomous perceptions of these countries were far from the reality. In both regions, the LGBQ community was gaining more attention and acceptance. When discussing cultural stories from Czech Republic, Darla gave many stories about people simply being accepting and

uninterested in fussing about a person's sexual orientation. One of Darla's favorite story was about her encounter with a high-status individual who talked about their gay partner at the first meeting with no coming out, no introduction, and no explanation:

The fact that that person introduced their relationship as a fact with no justifications (that are not needed, in my opinion), conveyed the idea that their relationship was as normal as any other relationship, and it was nothing to defend, discuss, or debate
(Journal 1, Line 50-52).

This sounded like the ultimate form of acceptance for Darla. Cultural acceptance to the point where sexual orientation was not a topic of focus, but a normal, passing aspect of life and relationships.

Darla was private about her sexual life to others. She did not feel it was any of their business. In general, she preferred to keep a small circle of trusted friends and continued to work on balancing her outgoing and introverted sides. In addition, she described herself as being quite conventional in her relationships and highly selective. She talked about the sexualizing of bisexual individuals and assumptions about their interest in threesomes, which was not the case for Darla. Darla discussed cultural narratives that were specific to bisexual stereotypes. As she matured, Darla described the process of looking inward, *I started realizing we're all just people and limiting oneself with gender, age, race, or whatever is just a little superficial* (Interview 2, Line 294-295). Darla talked about how chemistry and that special spark with someone that may not be based on conventional standards of beauty. Realizing that people were human beings was an important aspect of looking at what's on the inside, not the outside. In her picture, Darla drew a unicorn (see Figure 10).



Figure 10. Darla's picture.

She told me about a fairytale, a story of a unicorn who was trying to find other unicorns, I always interpreted it [the fairytale] as the weird person that I am, trying to find other weird people to relate to (Interview 2, Line 482-483).

Table 20

Selected Subthemes from Darla

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Darla	<p>Attuning to a holistic self rather than labels:</p> <p><i>I don't like labels so my view is that we're all human and you fall in love with a person, not gender (Interview, 1, 238-239).</i></p> <p><i>I started realizing we're all just people and limiting oneself with gender, age, race, or whatever is just a little superficial (Interview 2, 294-295).</i></p>	<p>Commentary on conservatism in U.S. culture:</p> <p><i>There's a lot of conservatism. That comes together with religion, you know? So with religion, it's like people are not supposed to be gay because God didn't intended it that way. There are a lot of conservative values that I feel Americans have. They are specific for Americans (Interview 1, 419-423).</i></p>	<p>Normalizing diverse orientations and relationships:</p> <p><i>The fact that that person introduced their relationship as a fact with no justifications (that are not needed, in my opinion), conveyed the idea that their relationship was as normal as any other relationship, and it was nothing to defend, discuss, or debate (Journal 1, 50-52).</i></p>

The thematic analysis showed how Darla viewed others and wanted to be viewed as a holistic self and being, and how labels were limiting and unnecessary for Darla. This supported the dialogic subtheme of normalizing diverse relationships to the point that any type of sexual orientation or relationship would not be a topic of discussion, given its place of normalcy in the rest of society. Darla grew up with the experience of normalizing sexual orientation. Being in the United States, she felt that there was not as much openness as one would assume. The structural analysis showed how Darla highlighted the conservatism in U.S. culture.

Victor's Story. Victor's parents were both in business. He described his mother as being more open-minded and his father stricter. His grandmother had retired and stayed at home. Victor described his family as being traditional and hardworking people. They originated from the northern region of Vietnam, where he described as being more conservative. He is closest to his sister who also studied abroad. Victor began studying abroad at a young age, staying with his host family.

Victor started to think about his sexual orientation in high school. He was not sure what to think about it so he went online to research and understand what LGBT identities were. One of his friends was transgender which made Victor conduct more research to understand transgender identities. He discussed the visibility of transgender people, and how it was easier to notice if someone was transgender than notice a gay person. Coming to the United States meant more freedom for Victor, freedom to explore sexual identity among other aspects of life. With his host family, Victor noticed how conservative his host mother was, which discouraged Victor from talking to her about sexual orientation and identity. He came out to his roommate, who was a bisexual man. He met him on Craigslist, and after the roommate talked about being gay-friendly, Victor was able to come out to this roommate. There was something different about

coming out to someone you did not know. Victor described it as a process of starting a new chapter with a new person. Given the lack of history in the relationship, one could start anew.

In Vietnam, people still considered sexual identity to be taboo, so coming out in the United States was easier. Victor described responses to LGBT people in Vietnam, *Being LGBT is still considered a taboo and people will find ways to "fix" you* (Journal 1, Line 6-7). In regards to his own response, Victor stated that he wanted to, *Challenge the status quo and just stand for myself for what is right. Sometimes you just need to live for yourself and not for the crowd of people that you barely even know* (Journal 1, Line 11-12). Victor talked about an LGBT organization in a big city in South Vietnam. The organization aimed to help LGBT people come out to their families. In other parts of Vietnam, coming out was not met with as much support. For instance, in the capital of Vietnam, coming out was very difficult. Victor regarded southern areas of Vietnam to be open-minded, though it did depend on the city itself.

Victor talked about changing his view point since coming to the United States. The new experience and seeing the world shaped Victor's lens, which was about seeing and learn new things. When asked about cultural identity, Victor described it as, *freedom of everything* (Interview 1, Line 414). He described himself as a nomad. In the future, Victor wanted to travel more and across the world. He had been travelling in Vietnam, Cambodia, and United States, *I've been independent for a long time now, and I don't like to be in one place* (Interview 1, Line 455-456). This nomad identity shaped how he saw people in their differences with full acceptance. He stated that every person's conscious was different and how he loved to accept everything in life. Victor sent me his drawn picture later on, one of him running and holding the rainbow flag, with a big smile on his face (see Figure 11).



Figure 11. Victor's picture.

Victor mentioned how being good at his job would allow others to be more accepting of who he was. He wanted a freelance job that allowed him to travel. He told the story of an LGBT advocate in Vietnam who rode her bike all over Vietnam in three months. With a limited amount of money, she brought her rainbow flag everywhere she went, delivering the message of acceptance toward LGBT people. Victor stated that he was a nomad just like her, and his appreciation for her message, *It's really nice to see. Even if she's straight or whatever, it doesn't matter because she is just supportive. She transmits strength and spread the message* (Interview 1, Line 546-547). Months later, Victor informed me that he was planning to become a skydiving

instructor. He was going to get trained. We touched based again after Summer 2016, and I learned that he had found a skydiving community, received training, and had made more than 20 jumps. In addition, I got to see pictures and videos of him skydiving, each time with a blissful smile of freedom on his face.

Table 21

Selected Subthemes from Victor

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Victor	<p>Success in nomad identity:</p> <p><i>...freedom of everything (Interview 1, 414).</i></p> <p><i>I've been independent for a long time now, and I don't like to be in one place (Interview 1, 455-456).</i></p> <p><i>It's really nice to see. Even if she's straight or whatever, it doesn't matter because she is just supportive. She transmits strength and spread the message (Interview 1, Line 546-547).</i></p>	<p>Commentary on visibility of LGBT people:</p> <p>In response to a question on how he understood his sexual identity:</p> <p><i>On the LGBT topic, they are just explaining what it is, and then at that time, one of my friends was transgender and he came out. And then all of that caught my attention, and I just did my research about it (Interview 1, 227-229).</i></p> <p><i>I think we should celebrate more gay pride parade so that way more people will notice our existence. More parade should equal more fun and more activities (Journal 1, 14-15).</i></p>	<p>Dominant story of LGBT as wrong or needing to be fixed:</p> <p><i>Being LGBT is still considered a taboo and people will find ways to "fix" you (Journal 1, 6-7).</i></p> <p>Alternative story of living for oneself:</p> <p><i>Challenge the status quo and just stand for myself for what is right. Sometimes you just need to live for yourself and not for the crowd of people that you barely even know (Journal 1, 11-12).</i></p>

In the thematic analysis, Victor discussed being and becoming a nomad. He identified culturally as a nomad and shared the story of a woman who biked around Vietnam to spread positive messages about LGBT people. This coincided with his alternative story of living for

oneself, travelling, and standing up for what is right. The subtheme of visibility emerged in the structural analysis as Victor researched LGBT identities to understand his sexual identity. This aspect of visibility and connecting to people across differences was spread throughout Victor's thematic, structural, and dialogic analyses because of his philosophy of embracing everyone.

Zang's Story. Zang had an older brother, mother, and father in his family. His mother had a strong personality and was a successful business woman. His parents often fought and argued. He had wondered about whether or not they should divorce, but given the shame of divorce in Chinese culture, his mother felt the need to stay in the relationship. In addition to the tension in the home, Zang felt that his parents favored his older brother. He felt that he disappointed them by going to a different university, which he had chosen because of his interest in hotel management. Given his bad memories with family, Zang focused on his individual success and relied on himself to be strong and self-sufficient.

In kindergarten, Zang started to think about his sexual identity. He noticed a recurrent cultural narrative that everyone around him supported:

And that time I find out I'm the different one cause everybody's just like oh...this guy love that girl. That girl love this little guy and I just like-what? The world's going down this way? It's not guy with guy, girl with girls? And at that time I realize, oh hey I'm the different one and I start worry about it since I was so little
(Interview 1, Line 211-214).

This was an ongoing message throughout elementary school. At this time, he realized he was different and worried about how others perceived him. Zang first disclosed being gay to a close friend, who stated that she had already known because he acted like a girl. In response, Zang felt a mixture of comfort and fear—comfort that his

friend did not mind, and fear that others would notice his femininity and assume he was gay. Zang never told his family. Generally, he described having negative experiences with his parents and brother, who often bullied him. Others made fun of him for acting like a girl. This reflected a hetero- and gender-normative narrative in the culture. This was also the beginning of the hiding. In order to not be seen as a gay person, Zang learned what people assumed about gay people and worked hard not to be discovered.

Zang described a turbulent childhood in his family household. He did not consider sharing much of his life with them. As he grew up, Zang struggled with mental health issues. He reported having depression, and finding that counselors were not always helpful. It was clear that he made much effort to seek help, but he also worried that his negative energy burdened others. He stated that counselors who suggested that he stayed positive were missing the mark. This was not a problem of positivity. In addition to a difficult family environment, Zang discussed not wanting to be gay and hating himself, *Yeah, and personally I really don't want to be gay. I feel like I'm the different one with the whole society and when I growing up I always hate myself. I-I find myself so disgusting* (Interview 1, Line 318-319).

The dominant story of being gay as being sick, immoral, and repulsive was taking hold in his list. He felt disgusted with himself. He felt that people in society would not accept him. At the same time, Zang talked about being exhausted from pretending to be straight and constantly worrying about how others see him. While growing up, Zang tried to hide by not talking with other gay people in China. He shared his subjugated stories of hiding, trying to act normal, *But sometimes I hide myself and pretend to be a straight guy because I don't wanna lose any opportunity that might come to me*

(Interview 1, Line 355-356). When sharing his story, Zang often stepped back to comment on the events that occurred. How he evaluated the event tied to his view of himself as different from others. While his focus was one of fear regarding how others thought of him, Zang also had a way of stating what he believed in, firmly. He commented about what he liked and did not like. This firmness in what he wants contributed to him taking the steps to accept being gay. He was willing to acknowledge how hiding affected him. The subjugated story of hiding was a strong one in Zang's story, but this started to shift when he came to the United States:

You know, I've been hiding myself for, I'm 20-21 years old-I've been hiding myself almost well, 21 years. The reason why I move out and I live by myself cause lot of people talk to me and they know who I am already, like um, don't keep hiding

(Interview 1, Line 567-569).

He began to meet other people who encouraged him to be himself and strive for personal happiness. His female friends in particular were supportive. He felt that America had issues of racism, but they were more open-minded about LGBT people.

In this sense, it was important that people in his surrounding context presented counter narratives, narratives about gayness as not a big deal or that people will still hate you even if you are perfect. Zang also moved out of the same place as his Chinese roommate, who he felt was not accepting of LGBT people. The step to move out was an important one for Zang. He talked to people at gay bars and his accepting friends. There are times in our conversation where he started to feel hopeless again. When asked to draw a picture to describe his coming in, coming out story, Zang could not draw one. Instead he wrote the word "helpless" and held it to the camera.

Being gay and Asian had been a difficult experience. Zang had started to construct some alternative stories for himself though. There were glimpses of the possibilities for accepting oneself, being authentic, and being happy. When asked about other parts of his personhood that bares importance to him, Zang talked about establishing himself educationally and financially. For Zang, educational and career success would allow him to live on his own, not have to depend on others, and protect himself for the societal judgements of being gay. Zang described the importance of having stable income. Achieving success was a form of protection, a way to keep his life going when the world did not accept him.

Table 22

Selected Subthemes from Zang

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Zang	<p>Process of finding independence and self-acceptance:</p> <p><i>Even though I come back to my home country, I'm gonna move out and live by myself (Interview 1, 278).</i></p> <p><i>Even though it's really hard for me to um, fully accept myself cause I've been hiding for 21 years. But I want to try to do it. (Interview 1, 583-585).</i></p> <p><i>I think um, it just the process for me to really um, accept who I am. And I'm doing it (Interview 2, 192-193).</i></p>	<p>Turning point of talking with supportive people:</p> <p><i>In the US, I'll, sometimes I go to the gay bar by myself, and I get a drink and there, I feel like I stay in a place, this really safe place. And I can really be myself. I can talk to the people who are next to me, and have a fun night (Interview 1, 418-420)</i></p> <p><i>I talk to the people, and they give me a really new idea about how to be yourself, which helps me a lot to be comfortable as a gay (Interview 2, 276-277).</i></p>	<p>Success as resisting marginalization and providing protection:</p> <p><i>What I-I'm trying to do is get a college degree, and then get a good job. That's what I'm doing, but for other people, it's just like oh, I'm gonna have a good life, but for me just like, protecting myself in another way (Interview 1, 561-563).</i></p>

Zang struggled with negative family experiences and hiding his sexual orientation. He did not want to be gay and felt that it was not normal. While there were counter narratives of support he received from others in the LGBT community, Zang commented on the difficulty of this gradual process. The dialogic analysis highlighted the significance of achieving financial independence and a good career. This connected with the thematic analysis subtheme of striving for independence, as he was proud of moving out of his roommate's place, and accepting himself as he made plans to live by himself in China.

Aditya's Story. Aditya had a brother, mother, and father. He started describing his parents' story of falling in love and getting married. They had been married for 40 years now. Both are friendly, though his mother liked to talk more than his father. His family lived in a small city, so Aditya was used to living far away from home to pursue higher education. They lived on the countryside, and his father had a farm with animals. Uncles and relatives on his dad's side lived in the same city. His culture involved seeing families as close-knit. Aditya and his brother were close to his mother.

At a young age, Aditya knew that he was different, *I had all these thoughts in my mind, and I just felt that I was not right* (Interview 1, Line 179-180). He felt that his sexual and romantic feelings were very natural for him. He did not read about them and did not see anything on social media. While he was never exposed to anything aside from the heteronormative stories of individuals and relationships, the thoughts and feelings came naturally for him, at a time when he did not even think it was possible for two men to be together. He had dated a girl before realizing it was not a good fit.

After breaking up with this girlfriend, Aditya reached out to a gay Indian group in Texas that met monthly. At the gay Indian group in Texas, Aditya experienced a turning point in his

story. Seeing these gay individuals and couples opened his experience, *I had no idea that it was even possible for people who were like me to be happy and comfortable together* (Interview 1, Line 277-278). He started to hang out with them and made friends. Aditya decided he would never hide himself from friends again. He talked about how coming out after a few years of friendship actually was harder, and it was better to tell people from the beginning.

Aditya talked about being connected to his Indian culture and the important of Hinduism in his life. While he feels connected to Hinduism, there were some complexities in his cultural identity, *I'm not sure about cultural identity, but being in the US has changed me a lot, in the way that I am more open-minded and independent now* (Interview 1, Line 423-424). What he loved about U.S. American culture was the capacity and space to be himself, and if he worked hard, nobody could stop him. At home, he did not feel comfortable disclosing his sexual identity. If he had not come to the United States, Aditya thought his process might have taken longer. Aditya had studied in the United States once before for his masters. After returning to India for a year, he applied again for his current PhD program. His subjugated story of hiding himself might have been extended if he had not come to the United States, *you cannot talk about these things, you cannot share anything, and you just cannot talk about it [in India]. That was one of the reasons I decided to come back to the US* (Interview 1, Line 438-440).

Aditya described the lack of acceptance in his country, *You can ostracized from the society if you're gay in India* (Interview 1, Line 172). Furthermore, he was fearful that people would be hard on his parents. For him, first and foremost, the laws need to change, to not criminalize gay sex in India. With the current criminalization of sexual orientation, parents would feel that their children could not engage in same-sex relations because it was considered breaking the law. The fight for legalizing gay sex had been a long battle for LGBTQ

organizations in India. In terms of his parents, Aditya believed that their views of LGBTQ people was not very different from most Indian people who believed it was a disease, something curable through a psychiatrist or marriage with a woman.

Aditya described other inequities in regards to the male-dominated society in India. While women had equal right legally, they were socially considered to be inferior to men in many parts of the country. Aditya gave examples of some families preferring baby boys to baby girls. Even in judging a feminine man, the message suggested that, *if you are behaving like a woman, that's not your potential, and you're behaving below your potential or something* (Interview 2, Line 89-90). Aditya displayed some feminine aspects growing up. It was interesting how inequities toward sexual identity, gender express, and gender were interrelated. He recalled incidents of his uncle or cousin pointing at a feminine movie character and joking about how the character behaved like Aditya. Embarrassed and hurt, Aditya worked on not being as feminine. He expressed, *I always felt that people who are very feminine, the gay men who are very feminine are very strong because they are made fun of every day, and they still choose to stay true to themselves* (Interview 2, Line 101-103). In this statement, he addressed a cultural narrative (men should not be feminine) that had become a dominant story for him (Aditya, you should not be feminine), and shifted to a counter narrative (feminine men were actually very strong).

Aditya also regarded social media as playing an important role for breaking down stereotypes and broadening views of LGBTQ people. He stated that Hollywood had more influence than people think, *People don't understand it yet, they don't see a lot of gay characters on TV or movies, and even when they are shown, they're misleading caricatures which are just there to make fun of* (Interview 2, Line 169-171). In addition to having more positive images of

LGBQ people in the media, Aditya talked about seeing gay people who looked like him. Aditya was aware of how other privileges such as gender and race intersected with sexual identity. Like some of the other international students, he had moved around the United States as well, and noticed the difference in level of acceptance in small versus big cities, and in various regions of the United States.

Table 23

Selected Subthemes from Aditya

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Aditya	<p>Success as being true to self:</p> <p><i>I always felt that people who are very feminine, the gay men who are very feminine are very strong because they are made fun of every day, and they still choose to stay true to themselves (Interview 2, 101-103).</i></p> <p><i>...always remember that your sexuality is part of your personality, and so never ever feel embarrassed about it. If someone cannot accept you for what you are, it's their problem, not yours (Forum, 10-12).</i></p>	<p>Turning point of meeting a gay Indian group:</p> <p><i>I had no idea that it was even possible for people who were like me to be happy and comfortable together (Interview 1, 277-278).</i></p> <p>Commentary on negative social media portrayals of gay people:</p> <p><i>People don't understand it yet, they don't see a lot of gay characters on TV or movies, and even when they are shown, they're misleading caricatures which are just there to make fun of (Interview 2, 169-171).</i></p>	<p>Dominant story of LGBTQ as a disease:</p> <p><i>They still think that it is a western concept or a disease which can be cured either by going to a psychiatrist or getting married to a woman (Journal 1, 16-27).</i></p> <p>Need for diverse portrayals of gay people:</p> <p><i>I see all these gay people who are usually white, and who don't have the same experiences as all gay people, but that's how gay people are represented in Hollywood, even now. It's always the white privileged person who can be gay (Interview 2, 244-247).</i></p>

Aditya appreciated the value of being true to oneself. The structural analysis highlighted how meeting an Indian gay group was a turning point in his process. Meeting the people in this group presented a counter narrative to the negative portrayals he was used to seeing of gay people. In addition, it connected with the dialogic subtheme of wanting to see more positive portrayals of gay people from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. These portrayals would possibly combat the dominant story of LGBQ as a disease.

Isabella's Story. Isabella told her story with openness and spiritedness. When telling her stories, she often recited what each person stated, giving a dialogue of what was said. Her migration story was complex, from travelling at a young age to having visas issues. Her family came to the United States after much difficulty trying to get a visa to come to the United States. She defined family as her and her parents, describing them as smart and educated people with degrees in engineering. They were clever, ambitious, and nurturing people. Generally they were good people, though they were close minded about race and sexuality. Isabella and her parents sometimes avoided conversations on these two topics which would likely end up in an argument. Of her other family members, both grandmothers have been an influence in Isabella's childhood, though the relationship with her paternal grandmother had grown strained over the years. Finally, her aunt was an eccentric, lone-wolf, whom Isabella trusted with her secrets and shared an appreciation of food, art, literature, and philosophy.

At the age of 21, Isabella fell in love with girl. She had never questioned her sexuality before that, and in her forum post, Isabella described it as a confusing, difficult, and fascinating experience. It was incredibly difficult for her to understand what was happening then. People asked if she was gay or bi, and she did not know, *It's hard to label because I couldn't negate all of my romantic and sexual experiences with men before that, and none of the labels felt like they*

fit (Interview 1, Line 49-51). There was pressure from other people to identify what she was. Nowadays, she used pansexual or queer to describe her sexual orientation. When she fell in love with this girl, she told her mother first. To her surprise, Isabella's mother responded with anger, *I can't believe you're doing this. She must have converted you. You're such a disappointment, and you've destroyed all my hopes and dreams* (Interview 1, Line 61-63).

Having been a good student and well-behaving child, Isabella talked about how this affected her, *To hear that this one aspect of my identity is the biggest possible disappointment for her was pretty, pretty heavy* (Interview 1, Line 66-67). After Isabella came out, her mother cried, hung up the phone, and did not return Isabella's calls in the next three months. Her dad's reaction was more surprised than mad or sad, *I'm not thrilled with this news, but I am sure it's just a phase* (Interview 1, Line 82-83). He was hoping that she ends up with a man eventually. Like her mother, he had not spoken of it since. As an only child, this really hurt Isabella and affected her close relationship with them. She felt depressed and sought counseling afterwards.

Isabella described the tension between her and her parents at times and the pressure to get married and have children, *For them, I'm weird cause they just come from a different generation and a different culture where it's normal to get kids early* (Interview 1, Line 149-150). While Isabella considered the possibility that she might not want kids, her parents wondered how that could even be a possible choice. Having distance during her study abroad time and at the current moment helped their relationship. Conversations about sexuality were marked with tensions, *We always end up having fights, and when it comes to my sexuality, it's something that I brought up once, and it was a total disaster* (Interview 1, Line 40-42). Since disclosing her sexuality, neither her nor her parents have brought it up in an episode she called denial. Despite the tension, Isabella wanted to retain the relationship with her parents, *I'm not that type of person*

[who cuts off from family]. *I want to have a relationship with my parents. And for example, right now I'm not telling them about my current girlfriend to preserve our relationship* (Interview 1, Line 243-245).

Coming out to her friends in Bulgaria garnered much support. She described her generation as the first adult generation post the Communist regime. Marked by Capitalism, technology, and mobility, her generation embarked a different mentality that was more open-minded and liberal. Isabella also had support through her girlfriend and her girlfriend's family. Overall, she felt safe enough in her community to hold hands with her partner in public. She described a time when she was harassed, and how scary that experience was. In that context, Isabella and her partner at the time were in a smaller, less diverse city. Currently, Isabella resided in a large city with her girlfriend. Her physical and mental health were both better.

Isabella heard few LGBTQ-related stories in her culture. She talked about one friend in Bulgaria who was bisexual, but did not use that label herself. Isabella explained about the private stories that may not be surfacing as much:

I guess the biggest difference is that it is much harder to find LGBT individuals in Bulgaria who are "out and proud" and they avoid labeling their sexuality, whereas I feel in the U.S. there is a lot of talk about where you are in the spectrum: are you gay, bi-, pan- etc. (Journal 1, Line 15-18).

Another difference for Isabella was discovering this aspect of her sexuality at a later age. In the United States, most queer people she met had known since being a teenager, whereas Isabella explored her sexual identity in her 20s while studying abroad in England. Retrospectively, she commented, *Looking back on my childhood, there are things that "make sense" and were possible hints of my sexual inclinations* (Journal 1, Line 26-27). Isabella was a strong advocate

for taking the time to really understand oneself. She often talked about reminding ourselves that we do not owe others any answers or explanations. She emphasized taking the time to figure things out, whether it takes years or our whole life.

Table 24

Selected Subthemes from Isabella

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Isabella	<p>Maintaining her relationship with parents:</p> <p><i>I'm not that type of person [who cuts off from family]. I want to have a relationship with my parents. And for example, right now I'm not telling them about my current girlfriend to preserve our relationship (Interview 1, 243-245).</i></p> <p><i>...there are even more layers of difficulty in understanding our identities and sexualities, and often times, this is complicated by our families (Forum, 16-18).</i></p>	<p>Commentary on the need of well-trained counselors:</p> <p><i>I felt very alone in college when I discovered my new sexuality. There was an LGBT group on campus, but I never ended up attending meetings. It felt intimidating. I'm better at one-on-one, which is why I sought out counseling. The college counselors were, frankly, useless, because all they did was ask me to talk about my feelings and then tell me that it's going to be okay. There need to be counselors who are specifically trained in LGBT issues (Journal 1, 41-46).</i></p>	<p>Alternative stories of belongingness:</p> <p><i>You should allow yourselves to explore your own dynamic with family, friends, and native culture, and understand that there is always, always a place for you in this world, and you will find it (Forum, 18-20).</i></p> <p>Describing a movie: <i>Uh but it's about a woman that has been gay her whole, and she's marrying her girlfriend. And it's about her parents finding out and going again through that cycle of disappointment and anger, and then coming around to support the daughter (Interview 1, 592-595).</i></p>

Isabella talked about the complications of her parents' reaction to her sexuality. While their rejection and disappointment hurt her, she wanted to maintain their relationship. This subtheme emerged in the thematic analysis and came up again when she discussed alternative stories of belongingness. The dialogic analysis highlighted how Isabella watched movies that

presented counter narratives of LGBTQ-supportive parents. She struggled with her parents' reaction, particularly her mother's. The movie offered a story in which parents were able to come around and support their children. This echoed her advice for others to figure out their own family dynamic and know that they will be accepted in some place in the world. In the thematic analysis, the subtheme of aloneness and confusion was a part of Isabella's story. This subtheme connected with the structural analysis, and how support group and counselors played a role in helping her process the situation. Isabella did not find the counselors to be helpful, and instead positive movies about LGBTQ people and relationships were more useful for her process toward self-acceptance.

Kenji's Story. Out of this group of storytellers, Kenji spent the most time in the United States. Having studied abroad for 12 years, he moved from the West coast to the northern region of the United States. In our first conversation, Kenji described his family as being upper middle class and well-educated. His family embodied traditional gender roles, though Kenji was careful when he used the term traditional. He situated this in culture and stated that a Western view may consider them to be enmeshed and indirect, but from a Japanese point of view, they are traditional and normative. Kenji had two older brothers who were also well-educated. His oldest brother took care of him when Kenji was a baby, and the middle brother provided support and emotional connection. As the youngest, he felt very close to his parents, and they talked often. They both worried about him being in the United States.

Kenji first thought of his sexual orientation in the fifth or sixth grade. At that time, he felt scared of disappointing his family and himself. It was not good in his culture to stand out, and there were expectations for success in the family. Kenji hated labelling himself, and he felt that his feelings was something very natural and did not define who he was holistically. Rather,

sexual orientation was one aspect of his identity. Before coming out about being gay, there was a gap in his close relationship with his parents. After coming out, they grew closer, and their relationship improved.

One year before coming out, Kenji suffered from an eating disorder and depression. His family started to worry about him. They knew he was struggling. At that point, Kenji felt that he needed to explain why he was struggling so much. He told his parents on Skype. It was a turning point for him and his parents, *Cause ever since that the relationship got better. At that point I was distancing and isolating myself, not only physically, but emotionally too* (Interview 1, Line 125-126). Kenji was worried about being a disgrace to his family, *Because they are so community based, so we have to worry about what people say about your or about the family* (Interview 1, Line 501-502). Kenji had more concern about his family, since they would be the ones most impacted by the community's response. In her initial reaction, Kenji's mom felt hurt and disappointed in herself for not being able to support him and help him in his struggle. His father expressed his concern about other people judging Kenji for being gay. Both tried to be supportive, but they were not ready to talk about Kenji's partner. Additionally, his parents were not sure what to do. They did not want to be insensitive, and at the same time, they were worried about Kenji. It took time, but his relationship with his parents improved since there was no longer this secret in their way. After a few years, he and his family were learning to communicate and talk about this issue. Last year, Kenji got married to his boyfriend, and his family loved his partner, possibly even more than they love him, according to Kenji.

Kenji found counselling to be helpful when he was feeling depressed. It provided a safe place in the face of a harsh reality. At that time he did not know any gay men or LGBTQ members: *I felt like I was by myself, me against the world kind of way...I was very isolated and*

also I think part of me was distancing myself from those too cause I was stuck in the middle not knowing where to go (Interview 1, Line 358-360). His university at the time also had a bad reputation for not supporting the LGBTQ community, and he did not want to risk losing his friendships at this university, since they were the closest thing he had to family.

Being in the United States generally helped Kenji focus on the fact that it is okay to be unique. It was a great experience for Kenji to understand who he was and who he wanted to be. Kenji regarded labels to be a starting point, but relying on the label can become constrictive. Being in the United States gave Kenji freedom to express more. Further, being trained as a systemic thinker in family therapy, helped Kenji address underlying emotions in relationships. He oriented himself towards emotion-focused therapy and Satir's experiential therapy.

Kenji discussed subjugated stories of hiding sexuality, *the stories are very similar in a sense that LGBTQ individuals are "abnormal" or "deviant" or something shameful and you and, most likely, you family members have to hide from others* (Journal 1, Line 10-12). From Kenji's perspective, Japan was somewhat monotonous, and therefore, they might not be as kind or accepting towards uniqueness or diversity. In a way, shaming towards any minorities might be slightly harsher in a monotonous culture than the United States. Generally, sexuality was not an acceptable topic of discussion in Japan. Thus, people tended to conform in fear of criticism. Kenji had not felt fear of physical attacks though there was always a fear of emotional bullying. He felt that keeping silent and ignoring the uncomfortable feeling of being incongruent prevented him from truly connecting with others, *As I mentioned above, I think I started just conform and obeyed the society's invisibility management of LGBTQ community* (Journal 1, Line 23-24). He also worried about his family's reputation within the culture, and how they would be treated. While Kenji's father was incredibly supportive, he also wanted to prepare Kenji for

difficulties in life. He and his parents started to talk about how it will affect the family and their reputation and identity as a family with a gay son. It took two to three years, but Kenji's parents were also learning to be more expressive about their thoughts with Kenji. He was very grateful for the support and understanding he received from his parents. Kenji talked about the privilege of having relationships and supportive connections, *I'm so lucky I have an amazing family* (Interview 1, Line 615). In a Buddhist-like way, he felt that running into these amazing people in life helped him appreciate what he had in front of him.

Table 25

Selected Subthemes from Kenji

Participant	Examples for Selected Subthemes		
	Thematic	Structural	Dialogic
Kenji	<p>Maintaining closeness with family:</p> <p><i>I didn't want to lie to them anymore because those are people who actually care about me</i> (Interview 1, 332-333).</p> <p><i>... so it is very natural for others to take some time to accept it, grieve the loss of future plan/expectation, and adjust to the new information. Never give up to let people who care about you in your life, and those people may be your family or close friends whom you consider and choose as your 'family'</i> (Journal 2, 15-18).</p>	<p>Turning point of coming to the United States:</p> <p><i>... it gave me an opportunity to explore who I am, and also being away from my family and their expectations. I have the freedom to be just me.</i> (Interview 1, 578-580).</p> <p>Commentary on visibility and invisibility management of identity:</p> <p><i>... part of me still feel like I have to do like somewhat like visibility management and invisibility management of my identity. Like either Japanese, either being gay... it is important but not necessarily define who I am, holistically, and completely so</i> (Interview 2, 732-737).</p>	<p>Subjugated story:</p> <p><i>As long as I did what people expect to be or do, I thought I would be ok and kept silencing and ignoring the uncomfortable feeling of being incongruent and sadness of not being able to connect with others as who I really am</i> (Journal 1, 26-28).</p> <p>Success as protection from marginalization:</p> <p><i>... he cannot protect me from everything so he encouraged me to work hard and be successful</i> (Interview 2, 199-200).</p>

Similar to several participants, Kenji wanted to maintain the close relationship he had with his family. The structural analysis highlighted moving to the United States as a turning point for him to have some distance from his family and culture to seek freedom as himself. It also revealed that Kenji continued to manage his visibility in both the U.S. and Japanese culture. The subtheme of family closeness was indicated by his father's care and concern for him, which surfaced in the dialogic subtheme of his father wanting to protect him from marginalization by encouraging him to be successful. The structural subtheme of visibility management also connected with Kenji's subjugated stories of feeling incongruent, alone, and silenced in his past. Since then, he and his family have been able to talk and express themselves with each other.

Shared Narrative of Implicit Contradiction between LGBQ and Family Identity

The narrative that LGBQ identity would be incongruent with being emotionally close to one's family resonated in the stories. Particularly, LGBQ sojourners who were close to their family had concerns about disappointing their parents and altering their relationships with family. The narrative of being LGBQ implies that one cannot be close to the family of origin, which presents a rising action in the sojourner's narrative arc. In story construction, a rising action refers to events that complicate matters and rises the story's tension (Göbel, Becker, & Feix, 2005). The narrative arc is the chronological construction of plot in a story. In this case, the implicit contradiction between being LGBQ and maintaining family closeness introduces substantial conflict for those who want to retain those relationships. This rising contradiction builds up the crisis of whether the storyteller can become a successful LGBQ sojourner and preserve their family relationships. This disrupts the narrative of success, but it also highlights the relevance of cultivating an alternative story of *sojourner's success*, which is described in the following section.

Shared Narrative Meaning: Sojourner's Success

In analyzing the narrative accounts collectively, I identified the shared narrative meaning across the stories and highlighted recurring themes and subthemes. As I laid the stories next to each other and pieced together their likeness and differences, the representation of the *sojourner's success* echoed throughout their stories. Cultivating success as a sojourner was a resonating thread in the stories of the LGBQ international students. Ideas around success as an international student connected these diverse stories together. The value of success was a significant aspect of the storytellers' experience. Studying in the United States was an opportunity for success, and international students were taking a leap from one culture to another to pursue some kind of desired goal or passion. The shared meaning of *the sojourners' success* included the themes of cultivating success in relationship to self and others, constructing new stories about success, using success as a form of resistance to dominant stories, and using success as an instigator of social action, and engaging needs that gear the sojourner towards success.

In this level of analysis, thematic, structural, and dialogic were interwoven. For instance, the theme of cultivating success emerged in the thematic analysis as underlying understandings of the plots being told (finding independence, feeling true to self, negotiating disclosure, etc.). It was also supported by the structural analysis where participants described the turning points of understanding their wants and feelings or meeting others who helped them figure out those feelings. Furthermore, the dialogic analysis revealed how cultivating success for LGBQ sojourners also meant reinventing new stories of success because some dominant stories centered on LGBQ identity as a disease or abnormality—similar to the shared narrative of implicit contradiction between LGBQ identity and family relationships.

To cultivate success, sojourners had to construct alternative stories of success, ones that oppose characterizing LGBQ identity as a disease or abnormality, and ones that host the portrait of a success LGBQ sojourner with an emotionally-close family. Table 26 presents the subthemes (from the previous section) under the themes of *sojourner's success*.

Table 26

Shared Narrative Meaning: Sojourner's Success

Theme	Subthemes	(# of participants)
Cultivating success in relationship to self and others	Cultivating independence, mentally, financially, etc.	(8)
	Being true to self	(10)
	Being accepted as a holistic self	(9)
	Becoming attuned to inner feelings and wishes	(8)
	Aiming for personal happiness	(6)
	Negotiating disclosure, whether or not they choose to	(6)
Constructing new stories about success for LGBQ sojourner	Maintaining family relationships	(5)
	Meeting models of successful LGBQ couples	(5)
	Meeting culturally-representative models of LGBQ people	(4)
	Talking with supportive friends, family, and LGBQ people	(6)
Using success as a form of resistance and social action	Accessing information through movies, class, online research	(8)
	Integrating LGBQ as part of the successful story	(7)
	Leading a happy, meaningful life as an LGBQ sojourner	(8)
	Learning about and acknowledging privilege in other ways	(5)
	Engaging friends and family to be more accepting	(6)
	Engaging colleagues in the school or work setting	(4)
Engaging needs that gear the sojourner toward success	Engaging in LGBQ community and organizations	(3)
	Larger community engagement	(3)
	University student organization specific to international students	(9)
	Positive messages in social media	(8)
	One-on-one interactions	(3)
	Support groups	(1)
	Training on LGBQ issues for counselors	(2)
	Workshops, panels, and classes	(4)
Mentor/mentee program	(1)	
Hotline	(1)	

Cultivating Success in Relationship to Self and Others. For many of the participants, cultivating success as an LGBTQ sojourner was a difficult process. Two of the participants experienced little to no difficulty with cultural acceptance of their sexuality, though both emphasized the need for independence as important. Cultivating success referred to ways that changed the person's relationship with themselves, by being true to oneself, self-acceptance, becoming more in tune with one's feelings, being accepted as a holistic self, and aiming for personal happiness. It also referred to ways to successfully navigate relationships with others, whether it was maintaining family relationships or negotiating disclosure based on context.

Auxy highlighted the subtheme of independent thinking:

I just want people to um, to find out what they like, what they love, who they want to be, what they want to do with their lives. You know, what they think and not what you know, social media tells them to think or what their folks tell them to think (Interview 2, Line 526-529).

In Zang's experience, redefining success as personal happiness motivated him to consider not hiding his identity:

Be happy. This is your life. Life is short. And I think people keep telling me that kind of information like, uh, being yourself, make yourself happy, is really important for you. And I said...I started to accept this information and I think yeah, it's right. I want to be happy (Interview 2, Line 206-209).

Many participants talked about being in tuned with their inner feelings and accepting them. Yu Chen was among one of them. In her journal, she reflected: *My own story, I feel, is somewhat different because I am still not sure of my sexual orientation. My heart is always open to a person that I feel is attractive, despite their gender (Journal 1, Line 15-16).* She established

herself an optimistic person, *I tend to open my heart to the people I feel I trust, and I'm willing to help.* (Interview 1, Line 352-353). Nothing captured her open heart and reflective peace in the face of life challenges more than the picture she illustrated. Yu Chen depicted herself sitting on a bench, enjoying the view of a lake; life is peaceful, and her heart is open (see Figure 12).

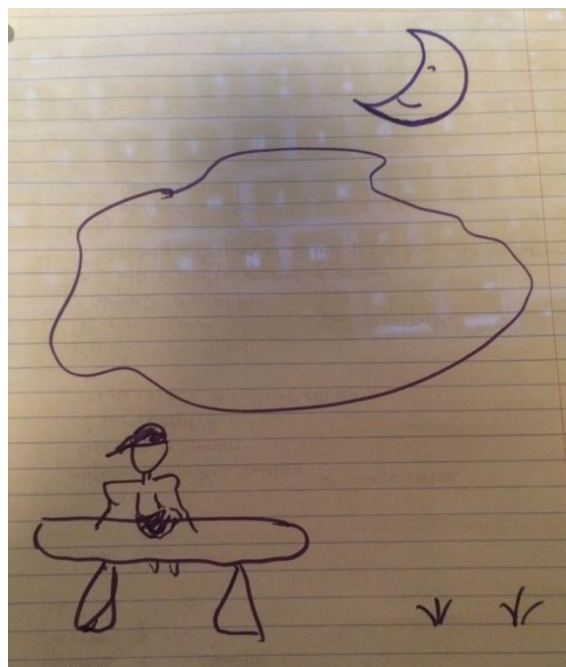


Figure 12. Yu Chen's picture.

Another subtheme was being accepted as their holistic selves, including their sexual orientation, but other aspects of who they are as well. For example, Benjamin explained that acceptance from his family members was not just about sexual orientation, it was also about how they could accept his emotions, such as tolerating his temper. In this regard, they were very accepting of his feelings and his responses.

This idea of holism was also present in the picture Kenji illustrated. He drew a systems metaphor of a tunnel (see Figure 13). In one end, information such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other aspects filter through the hole, affecting the holistic identity. Kenji explained how these different filters affected how he interpreted the information, and how he

could interpret the information differently to adjust to the environment. *Juggling*, he called it (Interview 2, Line 713). He advised others who were juggling these identities to be kind and patient with themselves and others. The picture was about being viewed as a holistic being.



Figure 13. Kenji's picture.

Kenji expressed his long struggle:

In my case, it took me more than 20+ years to accept it and be ok with myself, so it is very natural for others to take some time to accept it, grieve the loss of future plan/expectation, and adjust to the new information. Never give up to let people who care about you in your life, and those people may be your family or close friends whom you consider and choose as your 'family' (Journal 2, Line 14-18).

This also reflected the subtheme of wanting to maintain family relationships and the love and care they had for one another, despite sexual orientation being culturally unacceptable. Before coming out to his parents, Kenji was afraid. The narrative contradiction of LGBTQ identity and family closeness contributed to the tensions he felt at that time. Many years after coming out, his family was able to adjust to the new information and accept him and his partner. In Kenji's

story, he and his family were able to preserve their relationship and grow closer with time and understanding.

Constructing New Stories of Success. For the LGBTQ international student, the process of constructing success incorporated their sexual identity. In many cultures, including the United States, the construct of a happy, queer person did not always seem attainable. In some of the storytellers' culture, it was not present in the media, culture, and social conversations. The students were left to their own creative ability to reinvent or as narrative therapists would say, re-author the story of a successful lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning person (White & Epston, 1990). To reinvent themselves as successful LGBTQ-identified international students was also to re-author their cultural vision about success and demonstrate how the successful LGBTQ sojourner was a possible alternative story.

Part of the re-authoring was to construct the possibilities of LGBTQ sojourners within family relationships. In some cases, the family or cultural context may not be responsive to these alternative stories. In re-authoring, significant characters surrounding the LGBTQ sojourner could either reinforce the alternative stories or reject them, further complicating the process. In other cases, the process of re-authoring their success story required sojourners to question what they have been taught to believe. This is seen in Huang's picture of a fish that recognizes and embraces his big head after he travels to an ocean of diverse fishes and sea creatures (see Figure 14). The picture beautifully captured how his cultural vision was broadening, allowing him to gain access to alternative stories for being LGBTQ.

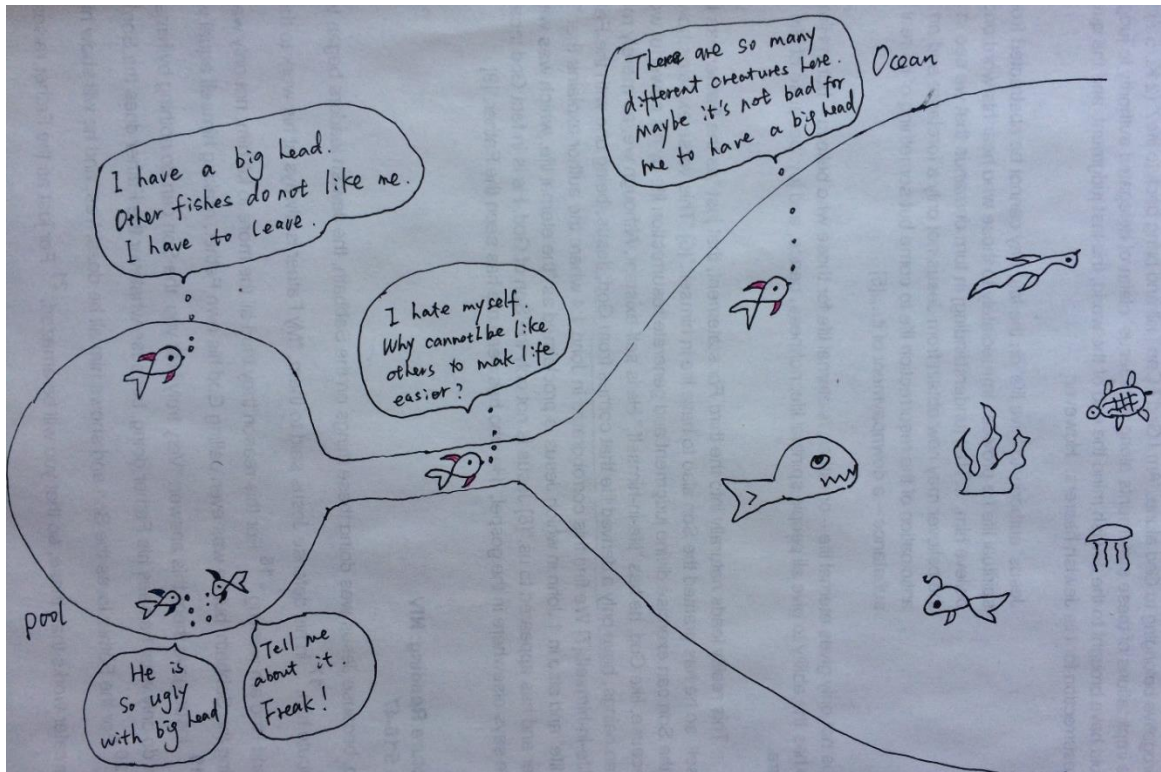


Figure 14. Huang's picture.

Being an LGBTQ person in cultures that did not always accept diverse sexual orientations meant that many of these sojourners questioned their world, beliefs, and even themselves from an early age. When there was no always a public outlet for those stories of challenging and questioning the status quo, the sojourners turned inward to seek questions or turned to others such as friends or advisors. Some of the sojourners turned to siblings, who, in this sample, were generally accepting. Jean Paul's sister, for example, supported him during his coming out process and was a close ally. This also challenges the narrative contradiction of LGBTQ identity and family closeness. At times, the participants found a support group outside of their family. For instance, Aditya's experience with the gay Indian group highly influenced his experiences in the United States. In the picture he illustrated for his coming in, coming out process, he portrayed the gay Indian group (see Figure 15). At the end, he wears a brown to symbolize his pride in himself and the group.

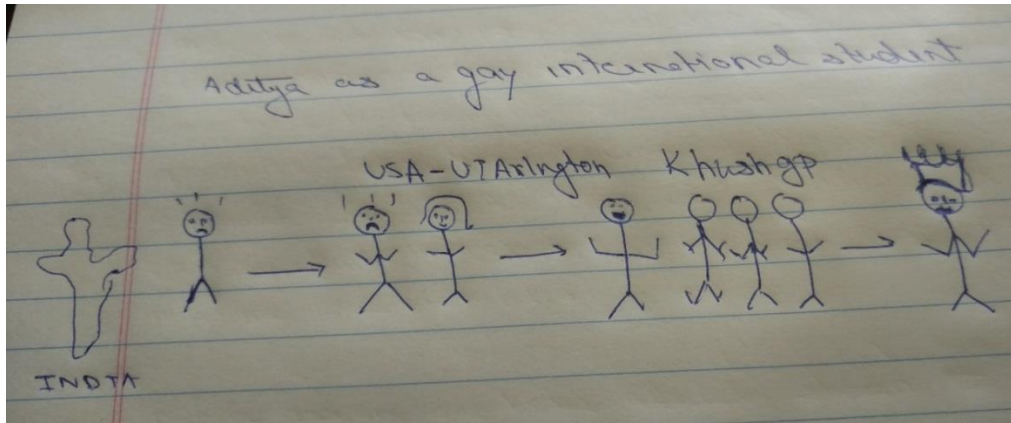


Figure 15. Aditya's picture.

Others seek education and information online to correct misinformed notions about sexual identity. For example, Benjamin felt okay in his identity when he researched surveys and data about sexual orientation online:

I went to the internet to look it up, to find related things. And the website have different ways you can figure out what kind of sexual identity and what kind of evidence that can show [your sexual identity]. So I did the survey, like a scale measurement. Then, once I figured that out, I'm like okay, so it is what it is (Interview 1, Line 278-281).

In Isabella's case, she took classes in human sexuality and queer theory and immersed herself in a variety of social media sources, *The only thing I found any support in was movies and TV shows. I sought out every possible or TV show about lesbians or bisexual women (which is a significantly lacking subset of television and cinema) (Journal 1, Line 46-48).* In the midst of feeling helpless, isolated, judged, and not accepted for who they are, the process of reconstructing success created possibilities and projected new storylines for their future.

Ling's picture depicted the beginnings of a happy childhood, and the expansion and growth she experienced in her teenage years (see Figure 16). For the young adult stage of her life, she drew the budding of two branches as parts of her separated, and she began to experience

more complexities in her life. On the far right side, an empty space was labelled “what’s next?” With the world open to her, Ling experienced some ambivalence about her next steps, but traces of her ability to make her own decisions, learn from them, and negotiate her sense of authenticity and openness would play a role in the next chapter of her life.

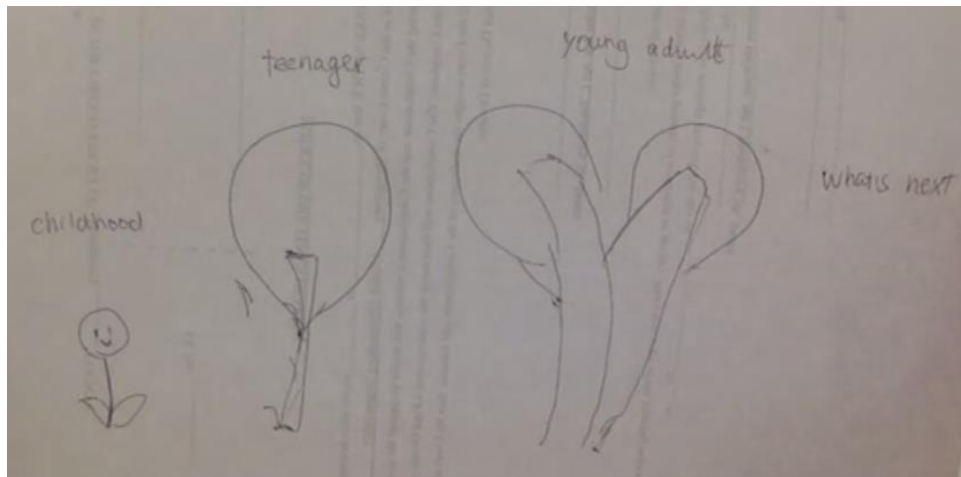


Figure 16. Ling's picture.

For people coming from non-U.S. American cultures, Isabella stated *...there are even more layers of difficulty in understanding our identities and sexualities, and often times, this is complicated by our families* (Forum, Line 16-18). She continued with some advice for other LGBTQ students, *You should allow yourselves to explore your own dynamic with family, friends, and native culture, and understand that there is always, always a place for you in this world, and you will find it* (Forum, Line 18-20). Isabella shared many of hers and her family’s difficulties in the process of travelling and coming to the United States. Many of these struggles have motivated Isabella in her own advocacy work. She drew a picture that symbolized the ups and downs of her process, and while it started with hardships, she began to start loving her journey and her story (see Figure 17).

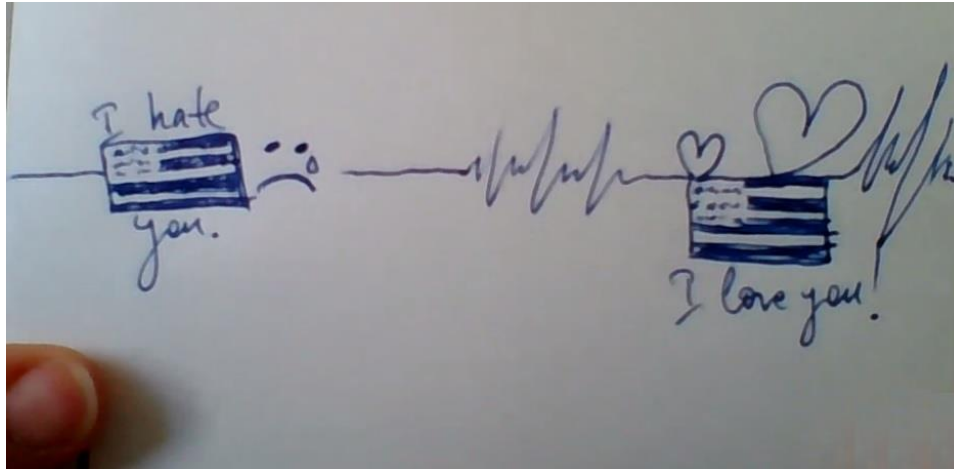


Figure 17. Isabella's picture.

Using Success as a Form of Resistance and Social Action. Success was form of resistance to societal standards and oppressive dominant stories about gayness and success. Huang described the dominant story of gay couples he was presented with, *The reason I didn't accept myself to be gay is because before, the image of gay to me, all of them have aids or they don't have very long-term relationships* (Interview 1, Line 185-187). While educational success could not negate the discrimination they might face as an LGBTQ sojourner from a different culture and country, it might be able to lift them from some of the hardships they would face had they not have attained the privilege of education.

Huang discussed the positive models for LGBTQ individuals in social media, and how their success impacted the way that society and others viewed them:

When people talk about Tim Cook, they will talk about how this man leads the most extraordinary company of the world, and when people talk about Martina Navratilova, they will count how many grand slams she won in her entire tennis career. I think all these successful people have set models for us, and impact the accepting environment globally for gay people (Journal 2, Line 34-37).

This sojourner's message was one of alternative possibilities where he described being gay as only one facet of a person's experience and the emerging storyline of leading a meaningful life, unconstrained by sexual identity. These examples and models for success would ignite other alternative stories for the LGBQ sojourners.

When your existence in of itself challenges the original cultural scripts for success, LGBQ sojourners stories needed stories that extended outside the dominant story. As Huang stated, *Being gay does not take our life away, instead it gives us the truth, and a life that we can take real control of* (Huang, Journal 2, Line 28-29). In recognizing the opportunities that lie ahead in their life stories, the students encouraged others like them to create positive meaningful in others' possible futures. Yu Chen expressed her message to other sojourners, *I would tell them about my own life story and feeling in order to show that even belonging to the LGBQ group, we can still have a positive and meaningful life* (Journal 2, Line 13-14).

Furthermore, within the framework of success was the idea that LGBQ sojourners could use their success to instigate social action and mobilize others to change. Some of the sojourners' passions were about helping others through their careers. Others were about helping the LGBQ community by being an example or model for success themselves or by changing other's perspectives and misinformation about LGBQ identities. Some sojourners incorporated sexual orientation in their line of career, through community work and research. Benjamin's leadership in the LGBT organization contributed to his success:

I'm trustful and hardworking, I care about students. I fight for their rights, things like that. Well I didn't realizing I was fighting for their rights. It was more like I'm there to help, to support and because of that, I have to say that I look back on my life, and

because of that [leading the LGBT organization] it give me so many awards, honors that I would never expect to have (Interview 2, Line 220-224).

Others talked to their family as a way to change hearts and minds, through a personal connection. Kenji's family was an example of immense growth both on the part of Kenji and his family, *My family is being very supportive of how I am, so I don't have to fit in the box anymore* (Interview 1, Line 566-567). Kenji also came out to friends in his family therapy program, in hopes of furthering their understanding as they become therapists, *The reason I come out to my classmates were more of hoping that they could help LGBT clients in the future because I was one of them, and going to therapy itself is scary event, and if those LGBT youth ever try to get help that may be the last chance they'll try* (Interview 1, Line 299-301).

In their stories, the students engaged with others with similar experiences to support one another. Aditya had some powerfully meaningful experiences with a gay Indian group in the United States,

They would have meetings every month. They would go on lunches and dinners, and they would talk, so I had never seen that. I had never seen gay couples, gay Indian couples before in my life. I had no idea that it was even possible for people who were like me to be happy and comfortable together. And doing very well in their lives, living smart, proficient lives, and I guess so that helped me a lot. I started going to these meetings and hang out with them (Interview 1, Line 275-280).

Some sojourners discussed the potential of going back to their country to create a support network for LGBQ people there or to educate others about the LGBQ community needs. They considered mentorship to be an important need for LGBQ international students in the United States and across the world. Some also talked about social advocacy and opportunities to

address the oppressive policies that either erase and render invisible LGBTQ persons or actively oppress and punish LGBTQ people.

Engaging Needs that Gear the Sojourner towards Success. The participants generated many ideas to gear the sojourner toward success. Most of them emphasized how an organization catered specifically to LGBTQ international students would be most helpful. For instance, engaging with an LGBTQ group that was not culturally diverse and did not have international students made it harder for them to relate:

From the experience in my university, there is a student organization composed of gay graduate students. I went there the first time as part of a mentor/mentee gay program, and I felt awkward because I did not see anyone I could identify with, in other words, no international students (Jean Paul, Journal 1, Line 56-59).

This is particularly important when international students struggle in coming from a society that does not support LGBTQ issues that much. The group serves as a safe place to gain support. Darla shared her thoughts on how a university club would be beneficial, *I think some university clubs would be helpful - like a safe place where people can share their stories, happiness and struggles, and where they do not have to worry about being judged (Journal 1, Line 56-57).* By being more inclusive of international students, it opens the door to those who identify as LGBTQ to connect and network. Aditya reflected on his experience:

Looking back I wish I had someone I could talk to at that time. I see a number of LGBTQ organizations in colleges and schools but none of them are targeted toward International students. I think providing them a platform where they can share their fear, experiences and providing them advice would be extremely helpful (Journal 1, Line 21-24).

A graduate student group would also benefit from having international students be a part of them. Other suggestions include larger community engagement such as social events and pride parades, one-on-one conversations and interactions, support groups, training for counselors on LGBQ issues, workshops, public classes, panels, mentor/mentee programs, and a hotline for LGBQ international students. Some participants highlighted the parallel between the international student struggle of adjusting to a foreign culture, and also the LGBQ struggle of negotiating their rights and life in dominant culture. Kenji suggested that it was important to, *help them normalize their struggle of adjusting and balancing and realize that they get to decide what works for them and that it is not black and white, nor “you are in” or “you are out”*. (Journal 1, Line 32-34).

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Findings from this narrative inquiry inform researchers, therapists, educators, student affairs personnel, and other administrators who work with international students. It broadens our understanding of how LGBTQ sojourners define and experience the coming-out process, particularly in the context of moving to a different country. In addition, the study focused on an often overlooked, underrepresented subgroup within the LGBTQ population.

Key Findings

One obstacle that many LGBTQ sojourners faced involved navigating the intersection of cultural and sexual identity. There is the risk of losing not only the support of their family, but also their cultural community if they disclose their sexual identity. In cultures that have tight-knit communities, the sojourners are concerned about their parents and family being ostracized from the cultural community for having an LGBTQ child. LGBTQ sojourners in this sample who wanted to maintain family relationship were concerned about the stress and burden that the family would have to deal with, should they come to others in their community. Thus, international students were more likely to tell their friends in the United States and siblings than their parents and family in the country of origin.

At the same time, they may not feel fully accepted or comfortable in the U.S. American LGBTQ community because of cultural differences, limited relatability, and potential racism. LGBTQ communities were not as culturally diverse as some hoped and several participants felt that their racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity was not present in LGBTQ groups and social media. In such cases, disclosing may feel like a tradeoff and deciding either way (to disclose or conceal) is a *lose-lose* situation.

The findings also showed how some international students came from countries where LGBQ issues were more widely accepted. These students highlighted how the U.S. American culture could grow in its level of openness and address religious factions that use religion to oppress, judge, and exclude diverse sexual orientations. Religion was not as much of an issue in this sample of students. Rather, the stressors of coming in and coming out were related to culture, gender roles, family expectations, and country-specific policies that criminalize sexual orientation. Participants discussed social pressures of pursuing a normative, traditional family structure. Some participants were afraid of disappointing their family. Participants who were not close to their family and had negative family experiences focused less on coming out to their families and more on individual success. Independence and distance from family and culture gave opportunity to process their feelings, wants, and needs. At the same time, many participants wanted to continue the closeness in their family relationships. Thus, the independence and freedom they strive for is not an individualistic sense of freedom out of relationship, but rather a freedom within relationships (Flemons, 2001).

In the present study, I explored how cultural narratives about LGBQ identities shape the disclosure experiences of international students. Their country of origin hosted a set of cultural narratives that they grew up with. As they entered the United States, they learn and interact with the cultural narratives of the host country, such as the narratives about healthy, successful coming-out processes and how sexual identity develops. This inevitably contributed to the evolving and co-constructed nature of sexual identity development. It also shifted the participants' cultural identity in different ways. While some felt that they were adopting aspects from both their culture of origin and the U.S. American culture, others felt more proud of and rooted in their cultural identity. Participants talked about various cultural narratives of LGBQ

persons, such as viewing diverse sexual orientations as a curable disease, an immorality or perversion, or an abnormality. In a few cases, participants felt that there was not much visibility at all, and they grew up not knowing that being LGBQ was even an option. In addition, two participants grew up with generally positive narratives about LGBQ people, in areas where sexuality was considered fluid.

One finding was how many of the LGBQ sojourners were aware of their privileges and other oppressions. The participants discussed other inequalities such as class, gender, and race in their countries and the United States. Some gave examples of other forms of oppression and acknowledge ways in which they were privileged by being male, educated, or white. Many students were using their privilege of education to serve others and to gain access to more information and broaden their knowledge. Misinformation was a common obstacle to understanding LGBQ identities in some participants' culture of origin. Participants balanced both the importance of being accepted for their sexual orientation, but also being seen as a holistic being, not defined just by their sexual and cultural identity.

Some participants talked about racism as a problem in the United States. White international students might still be considered an outsider, while international students who were not white might experience more racism. Gender normative ideas about femininity and men also emerged in the findings. The men seemed to have less space to be sexually fluid, while the women in the study seemed to have more social expectations for marriage and bearing children. In some cases, being the one child, especially the only male child, increased the pressure from family to have a heteronormative relationship, get married, and have children.

The shared narrative of sojourner success may contribute to understanding how LGBQ sojourners are able to reinvent personal, family, and cultural ideas about success to fit and

integrate their sexual orientation and cultural identity. In the course of the study, the participants journaled about how helpful it was to reflect on their experiences and process the timeline of their coming in, coming out experiences. Some participants felt that they had more to say beyond the interviews set up for the story. I believe there was something useful for the students in the safe space of talking about their experiences. In addition, by highlighting turning points in their coming in, coming out process, I learned about the many ways in which LGBQ sojourners constructed new stories and resisted against oppressive dominant stories. It was a process of experiencing multiple counter narratives, finding support in different ways, and being able to interact with other stories of successful LGBQ sojourners.

In generating ideas about ways to support LGBQ sojourners, the participants thought of a wonderful list of ideas, from creating student organizations to mentorship programs. While the forum did not present much data for the study nor did it continue, there could be some possible ideas for using social media and online connections to create a support network for international students who may not be connected in that way. The combination of having their own group that catered to the specific needs of LGBQ international students, and educating diverse cultural communities about LGBQ issues were all regarded as important ways to generate acceptance and understanding. Both private and public methods of support were important, given that some international students might not want to openly associate with an LGBQ community. With concerns about outing themselves, they are further isolated in their struggle. Thus, one-on-one interactions, mentorship, access to movies and information that dispels single narratives of sexual orientation, and therapeutic support are potential options when privacy is a concern.

Narrative Therapy

Using narrative therapy as a theoretical framework enhanced this narrative inquiry. In narrative therapy, people are not viewed as problems. Rather, problems are external to the people they influence. The issues related to LGBTQ identity are regarded socially constructed, shaped by language, and maintained by dominant discourses. Cultural narratives about sexual and cultural identity shape the stories of the LGBTQ sojourners. Experiences are constituted by multiple narratives rather than one single narrative. Thus, the stories presented in this study could be told in an infinite of other ways. Riessman and Speedy (2006) proposed that the narrative turn had entered the psychotherapy professions in the past 20 years. They suggested, “Dialogue is needed if narrative inquiry—in all its diversity—is to find a firmer foothold within counseling, psychotherapy, and social work scholarship” (Riessman & Speedy, 2006, p. 449). The present study is a part of this dialogue. I believe the study demonstrates how narrative therapy informed narrative inquiry in ways that coincide and opens space for creativity.

I also provided a guide to narrative dialogic analysis by using the concepts of cultural narratives, counter narratives, dominant, subjugated, and alternative stories. This enabled me to look closely at the construction of stories within culture. It also allowed me to look at the stories as embedded within larger power structures. For instance, cultural narratives that present sexual orientation as an abnormality may or may not become a LGBTQ sojourner’s dominant story. If the abnormal cultural narrative represents the sojourner’s self-perception, it gives power to this narrative as it becomes a dominant story (e.g. I am abnormal because I am gay). Meeting successful LGBTQ individuals that are kind, happy, and live like everyone else provided a counter narrative that may or may become an alternative story (e.g. I am LGBTQ, and I can be happy and find a relationship like everyone else).

Intersectionality

The concept of *intersectionality* is important to consider in research on diversity and multiple social identities in the field. From an intersectional view, sexual and cultural identities are inevitably intertwined. They shaped one another, and are shaped by other social locations of class, gender, religion, and so forth. Intersectionality frames the LGBQ international student not as an LGBQ person and not as an international student. Rather, the individual is a dynamic being, embodying all their identities in its multiplicities at once. Thus, the individual also embodies multiple privileges and oppressions depending on their social locations and context all at once. Crenshaw (1989) highlighted how those at the intersections of marginalized identities face multiple, intersecting challenges. For instance, some participants regarded the importance of not only seeing positive portrayals of LGBQ individuals and couples, but also seeing culturally-diverse portrayals of LGBQ individuals and couples, of people that looked like them. While this study focused on sexual and cultural identity, the participants introduced other parts of their identities (such as age, gender, educational status) as well that shaped their coming in, coming out story. One participant discussed how his white, male privilege buffered the impact of LGBQ discrimination given the co-occurring experiences of sexism, racism, and heterosexism. Another participant noted how the lack of ethnically diverse LGBQ people and relationships in social media shaped his story.

Comparison to Previous Literature

In contrast to the coming out models, LGBQ sojourners in this study focused more on the inner process of understanding and thinking about their sexual orientation as well as the process of protecting their parents from disappointment and from their cultural community's reaction. There was less emphasis on coming out as a function of people knowing, and more emphasis on

finding inner congruence, acceptance, and attunement to feelings. This was more salient for participants whose cultural context was less expressive and generally less open to talking about other taboo topics. Participants in this study were more likely than other studies on LGBTQ international students, to identify less with the label of their sexuality. They tended to emphasize the limitations of labels and embraced their holistic being. Similar to previous literature, the role of social media, gender, and conservatism were significant in the participants' experiences. The current adds to previous literature by addressing the significant turning points in the LGBTQ sojourner's story and redefining the narrative of sojourner's success. It also identifies more of the inner process and how relationships with others shape and is shaped by their storytelling. Possibly, the use of the timeline and journal allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the sojourners' experiences.

Limitations

The study could have taken a closer look at the legal policies of the participants' country of origin and the legal policies of the state they resided in the United States. There were many aspects of intersectionality that could be focused on, such as class and age. The students were mostly graduate students, and a number of them have studied in different universities in the United States or in other countries. Given the sensitive nature of this topic, selection bias is one of the study's limitations. LGBTQ international students who decided to participate might differ from others who did not. During the interviews, some participants chose not to show their faces, as to protect their confidentiality. This suggests the various levels of comfortability with participating this kind of study. Participants who started and finished the project might have more support systems, be further along in their process, or perceive less risks with participating in this study. On the other hand, participants who lacked substantial support and needed a safe

place to process their experiences might have also reached out to this project as a resource that they might not have accessed otherwise.

The participants explored many events on their timeline, but given the retrospective nature of data collection, there were limitations in the recollection of these memories. Most of the data richness came from the interviews, journals, timeline, and picture that the participants drew. Given the spacing of the interviews, the forum might not have attracted as much participation because of the timing and the way it was set up might not have been conducive to interactive conversations. In addition, motivation to complete tasks such as interviewing with the researcher versus independent tasks such as the forum may differ for the participants.

The region of the student's arrival and origin was not explored as deeply, though a few participants discussed the sociohistorical stories from their region of origin. In addition, the range of time spent in the United States played a major role in the coming in, coming out process as the participants ranged from being in the United States for 6 months to 12 years. In this study, participants were engaged with the co-construction of narratives across multiple time points, but member checking was not used as a method to increase rigor and trustworthiness of the data. Given the isolation and marginalization that this particular population experiences, engaging participants in a more, but engage the participants in a transformational process of shaping the telling of their stories, would have been powerful.

In the process of re-storying, sexual identity could have been perceived or presented as more static than it actually was in the participant's experience. For instance, some participants noticed their sexual feelings and orientation early on in elementary and middle school, even if they had not yet acquired the language to describe their experiences. For others, recognition of this sexual identity occurred later on, while studying abroad in the United States or in another

country prior to the United States. Some preferred not to label themselves to avoid the risk of reducing the richness of their stories and experiences into social categories. At the same time, the cultural context and language around sexual identity is also continuously changing. This contributes to a layered, interactive process with many moving pieces in the coming in, coming out process. Given the diverse experiences of the participants, their various social identities, privileges, and oppressions interact in a complex, dynamic manner that have not been fully captured in this study. Underlying points the participants made about the bias against feminine men and the intersections of race and class could have been further developed to understand the layers of intersectional oppressions and privileges. While narrative inquiry provided a temporal understanding of the stories, the stories continue to transform. If asked about their narratives at a different point on their timeline, the participants' stories would inevitably evolve to reflect to their current lens. In addition, the participants' needs might have been different depending on where they are at in their story.

Future Research

Future studies could explore the experiences of LGBTQ international students from particular countries, and conduct a more in-depth analysis of how the culture contexts of that country shape their experience. Researchers could also interview family members of the LGBTQ international students, including people in the United States who became a part of their family. For example, participants in this study listed international and U.S. American friends, instructors and advisors, as well as their host family as family members. A longitudinal follow-up of a LGBTQ international student's coming in, coming out process from their arrival to the United States, throughout their studies abroad, and post-graduation would extend a rich, temporal understanding of how studying abroad shapes their coming out process. Finally, researchers

could conduct future studies to better understand the relationship between the culture of the region/city where international students arrive and the culture of the region/city of their origin.

Implications for Educators and Administrators

As universities create opportunities to celebrate diversity based on racial, ethnic, and cultural background, they could also celebrate diverse sexual orientations and identities to further empower international students. Administrators and educators could invite the lost voices of those who have been oppressed to the conversation of celebrating the diversity from the beginning of students' campus life. This was informed by the participants' suggestions that universities not take for granted the awareness and progress in the United States. While the United States may be more advanced in LGBQ rights and awareness than some countries, international students from many countries or cultures may not be allowed to even speak about sexuality. In addition, international students can add different perspectives to the university and strengthen the LGBQ community.

Furthermore, as identified in this study, advisors, professors, and mentors play a role in the lives of international students. They can become a part of the student's family during their study abroad. Having an instructor who supports the student both professionally and personally through social acceptance of their sexual and cultural identities could be particularly important for international students. Administrators and student affairs personnel could create opportunities to embrace both cultural and sexual diversity, such as creating workshops, panels, and classes on LGBQ issues for international students. Another idea is to invite an LGBQ advocate with a global perspective to train staff and administrators that work with international students. Most universities in the United States that have international students also have an office that manages their paperwork, advising, and studies. Administrators and personnel are at

the frontlines of addressing the concerns of international students, and therefore have the opportunity to engage in conversations that support LGBQ international students. LGBQ educational programs on campus such as Safe Space or Safe Zone could include a section of their curriculum on global issues revolving LGBQ identities and relationships. Finally, educators in classrooms can incorporate international issues into curriculum when discussing LGBQ identity and experience. Gaining a global cultural perspective and understanding of the policies that the students face, should they return to their country of origin is also a useful area of exploration.

Implications for Clinical Practitioners

Therapists working with LGBQ sojourners may need to consider the complex binaries and double binds of their experiences. In other words, therapists may need to consider the conflicting risks and benefits that some LGBQ international students face. They also need to consider the diverse origins and experiences of international students and take time to learn about how their clients understand and relate to their specific cultural context. Clinicians may need to slow down the coming out process to hold space for the students to navigate the tensions and ambiguities in the space between sexual and cultural identity. This means resisting the urge to impose the U.S. centric view of coming out onto their clients. Furthermore, therapists are reminded not to neglect the family they are constructing in the United States and the family in their country of origin. Although their family is not physically present, their relationships remain intact and may be salient to their stories.

The multitude of narratives about sexual identity, cultural identity, and other salient parts of their holistic self should be considered from the lens of the sojourners, each of their family members, and the therapist. Regardless of the therapist's therapeutic approach, recognizing the

relational aspects of their coming in, coming out stories are vital to situate their experiences within cultural context. Therapists also need to unpack their own positionality and address their biases, privileges, and social locations. Clients from marginalized positions may be attuned to how culturally responsive and humble their therapists are. They may be reluctant to share their intimate stories if therapists display an implicit bias or lack of awareness regarding one's own privileges.

Therapists can help LGBTQ sojourners re-story their narratives to construct alternative stories that open up relational possibilities for their clients. The essence of narrative therapy is reconstructing identities and narratives in ways that are useful and empowering. Thus, using a narrative therapy lens may be particularly useful for addressing areas of resistance against oppressive dominant stories. In addition, some international students may resist coming out. This is an area worth exploring for all therapists, and without pressuring the student to come out or not, therapists can discuss the function of resisting disclosure and the potential risks and benefits it might entail. What are the potential wisdoms of not coming out? How does social, family, and cultural context shape the process of deciding whether or not to disclose? While the pictures and timelines were used as data collection tools in this research, therapists of various therapeutic orientations could apply them as interventions to capture their clients' story. Therapists could ask clients to draw what they are experiencing in the coming in, coming out process or construct a timeline together to highlight the turning points of their story. These turning points might represent unique outcomes that contradict the unwanted, problem-saturated dominant narrative (White & Epston, 1990).

Lessons Learned

Narrative inquiry requires prolonged engagement with the storytellers and time to immerse in their stories. Thus, timeliness and organization is of utmost importance. As with any research, handling rich data one bit at a time was necessary to suspend the feeling of being overwhelmed. Narrative inquirers have warned about the feeling of drowning in one's data, but like any metaphor about swimming, the inquirer must lay flat with their body in full contact atop the water to stay afloat. In future qualitative endeavors, I hope to remain engaged with the data more consistently.

In addition, I learned about how the pertinence of the writing process in qualitative work. The analytic memos I wrote during the interview process were tremendously helpful in the analysis. As I wrote, ideas flowed and grew, intertwining with the participants stories. My writing was not that different from their storytelling and journaling. I noticed how the participants' journals convey more reflexivity than their interviews. Some individuals may find it easier to journal in their own time. They can edit journal and complete it at their leisure. Similarly, my audio-recorded and transcribed memos were more reflective of the current moment, while my typed analytic memos conveyed more thought and reflexivity.

I have had the honor of meeting these sojourners and being able to hear stories, some of which are a secret to others. This have helped me learn about how within context, all stories make sense. When parts of ourselves are unwelcome or uninvited, it creates a container of hidden stories that extends a feeling of incongruence and disconnection, when in actuality, the missing pieces and threads may be ostracized or silenced. In finding these threads, I better understood how holistically congruent and connected LGBTQ sojourners are, and how stories were tools for empowerment and social change.

Conclusion

This study explored the coming in, coming out stories of LGBTQ sojourners through the lens of intersectionality and narrative therapy, in hopes of generating rich narratives of their experiences. While some of us might have had the privilege of staying in our place of origin, sojourners are navigating new waters and are at frontier of being uncomfortable. As sojourners, they survey the landscape of cultural visions, clashes, and interactions. Distance from family and their culture of origin constructs physical and emotional borderlands. Within these liminal spaces are the possibilities of learning and challenges. I hope that others will read their stories and relate to their struggles, courage, and resistance. Perhaps describing their stories as *being in and out*, and *being in and not out* better capture how layered and dynamic their narratives truly are. Some of the storytellers in this study included their participation in this research project as an event on the timeline they constructed, demonstrating the ongoing nature of their process. The experience and language of *coming in* and *coming out* embody a complex, nuanced, and unique process that is continuously transforming without a destination for arrival.

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Appendix A

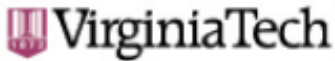
Logic Model

Study Purpose: Explore how LGBQ international students navigate their cultural and sexual identities

Objectives	Implementation	Outcomes	Evaluation	Budget
1.) To explore the experiences of LGBQ persons who are coming in the United States as students and coming out about their sexual identity.	❖ Recruit 8-10 participants who identify as LGBQ and are international students in the US.	❖ Narrative analysis of interviews honors and highlights the stories of a population that is often neglected.	❖ Timeline process gives participants space to retell, add, or alter their previously told stories.	❖ \$50 amazon gift cards X 10 participants = \$500
2.) To explore the cultural narratives that emerge in their disclosure process.	❖ Conduct two interviews and journals about their coming in, coming out experiences, their family relationships and support systems, and the intersection of narratives about their cultural and sexual identities.	❖ Interviews and journals help participants explore their process of telling their stories and deepen their understanding of their narratives.	❖ Researchers asks for feedback about the research process throughout and negotiates the needs of the participants and the researcher-participant relationship.	❖ Recruitment materials = \$50 ❖ Digital audio recorder = \$50
3.) To learn about their needs and generate potential ways to support LGBQ international students as they decide whether or not to disclose their sexual identity.	❖ Ask participants to voluntary share their stories on a forum with other participants.	❖ Timeline helps participants place their stories within the larger cultural contexts and consider the influence of past, present, and future.	❖ Researchers asks for feedback about the research process throughout and negotiates the needs of the participants and the researcher-participant relationship.	Total = \$600

Appendix B

IRB Approval



Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
 300 Turner Street NW
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
 email irb@vt.edu
 website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 4, 2016
TO: Fred Piercy, Hoa N Nguyen, Erika L Graftsky
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires July 29, 2020)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Coming In and Coming Out: Navigating the Spaces between Cultural and Sexual Identity
IRB NUMBER: 15-1195

Effective January 4, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
 Protocol Approval Date: **January 4, 2016**
 Protocol Expiration Date: **January 3, 2017**
 Continuing Review Due Date*: **December 20, 2016**

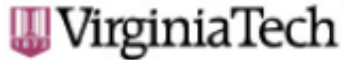
*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

IRB Approval Extended

Office of Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
 300 Turner Street NW
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
 email irb@vt.edu
 website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 6, 2016
TO: Fred Piercy, Hoa N Nguyen, Erika L Grafsky
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Coming In and Coming Out: Navigating the Spaces between Cultural and Sexual Identity
IRB NUMBER: 15-1195

Effective December 6, 2016, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Continuing Review request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at: <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7**
 Protocol Approval Date: **January 4, 2017**
 Protocol Expiration Date: **January 3, 2018**
 Continuing Review Due Date*: **December 20, 2017**

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

Appendix C

Recruitment Materials**Initial Email**

Dear [Name],

My name is Hoa Nguyen, and I am conducting a study on the coming in and coming out experiences of LGBTQ international students. For the study, I am inviting the stories of international students (current or graduated in the past 3 years) who also identify their sexual orientation as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, homosexual, other sexual minority identities, and students who are questioning or feel unsure about their sexual orientation. Participation consists of engaging in one-on-one, confidential interviews, writing brief journals on their experiences of coming in to the United States and deciding what to (and how to) tell family and friends about their sexual orientation, and a voluntary forum. Participants can choose to opt in and out of various parts of the study. The identity of all participants are protected. Participants will receive \$15-\$50 amazon gift card depending on the extent of participation

If you are interested in participating or have questions, please email CICOstories@gmail.com. An informed consent with more information about this study is at the following link: [\[Link\]](#). If you do not fit the criteria for participating in this study, please help spread the word about this study for others who may be interested.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Hoa

Hoa N. Nguyen
Doctoral Student
Marriage and Family Therapy Program
Department of Human Development
Virginia Tech

Social Media (Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, LinkedIn, Websites, Blogs, Skype, etc.)**RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT LGBTQ INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:**

I am inviting you to share your stories as international students (current or graduated in the past 3 years) who also identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, homosexual, and those questioning or unsure about their sexual orientation. Participation consists of engaging in confidential interviews, writing brief journals on your experiences of coming in to the U.S. and deciding what to (and how to) tell family and friends about your sexual orientation, and a forum. The identity of all participants are protected. To compensate for your participation, you will receive \$15-\$50 amazon gift card depending on the extent of participation. If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact CICOstories@gmail.com. An informed consent with more information is at the following link: [\[Link\]](#). If you do not fit the criteria for participating in this study, please help spread the word about this study for others who may be interested.

Social Media Shortened Version**RESEARCH STUDY ABOUT LGBTQ INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:**

I am inviting you to share your stories as international students who also identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, homosexual, unsure, questioning, etc. Participation consists of confidential interviews and journals reflecting on your experiences. To compensate for your participation, you will receive \$15-\$50 amazon gift card. To participate, please contact CICOstories@gmail.com. For more information, see: [\[Link\]](#).

Flyer

Research Study on the **STORIES & EXPERIENCES** of

LGBQ international students

International students who identify as homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, or feel unsure & questioning their sexuality are invited to participate in this study through one-on-one interviews (60-90 mins), reflections (30 mins), and forum post (30 mins).

Share your story on coming into the US & deciding whether or not to tell your family and friends about your sexual identity.

CONFIDENTIALITY is strictly protected.

PARTICIPANTS RECEIVE:

- ❖ **\$15** amazon giftcard
After first interview & reflection
- ❖ **\$35** amazon giftcard
After second interview & reflection **OR** an anonymous forum post

To participate or for more info, contact **CICOSTORIES@GMAIL.COM**

RESEARCHER: Hoa N. Nguyen, Doctoral Student in Human Development @ Virginia Tech



Appendix D

Informed Consent

Title: Coming in and coming out: Navigating the spaces between cultural and sexual identity

IRB Approval Number: 15-XXXX

Investigators: Hoa N. Nguyen, Doctoral Student

Contact: CICOstories@gmail.com

Introduction

My name is Hoa Nguyen, and I am conducting a study on the cultural and sexual identity of international students. Participants will be asked about their experiences of coming in the United States and deciding what to (and how to) tell family and friends about their sexual orientation.

Purpose

The purpose is to explore the stories and experiences of LGBTQ international students and better understand how cultural narratives shape the process of disclosing sexual orientation to others. The results from this study will be published for a dissertation and shared (anonymously) with members of AcrossBorders@VT, a group of LGBTQ+ international students at Virginia Tech to help them attend to the needs of their group members.

Participation in this study involves:

- ❖ Demographic survey (5-10 minutes)
- ❖ Two one-on-one, confidential interviews (estimated 60-90 minutes)
- ❖ Two brief journals your experiences in the interview **OR** one journal and one forum post (estimated 30 minutes)
- ❖ Interviews are held via Skype or Googlechat; journals are submitted online

Eligibility Screening

To participate, you must fit the following criteria:

- 1) You are a current international student studying in U.S. or graduated in the past 3 years.
 - 2) You identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, unsure, or questioning your sexual orientation
- If you meet these criteria, then you are eligible to participate in this study.

Consent and Confidentiality

Your responses will be completely confidential. You are assigned pseudonyms to protect your confidentiality. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. Your consent is obtained prior to participation in the study. After submitting your online consent form, you can access and submit the demographic survey. Interviews are video and audio recorded. All audio files and journals are kept in a locked laptop, secured in the researcher's office.

Risk and Benefits

There is minimal risk to participating in this study. You may benefit from having a space to talk about your stories and experiences. I appreciate your involvement and request your feedback on the results to ensure I am accurately representing your experiences. This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Tech.

Compensation

Participants will receive \$15 - \$50 amazon giftcard for their participation. Amount of compensation depends on the extent of participation.

Below is the extent of compensation for each step of the study:

- 1) Interview 1 & journal → Receive \$15 giftcard
- 2) Interview 2 & journal OR forum post → Receive \$35 giftcard

You will receive a \$15 amazon giftcard after the first interview and journal is completed and a \$35 amazon giftcard after the second interview and journal is completed, totaling up to a \$50. After the second interview, you are given the choice to write a second journal OR post your reflection on a private forum for LGBTQ international students with a pseudonym. There is no difference in compensation and no penalty for choosing either to do a second journal or a forum post. As stated, interviews are conducted through Skype or Googlechat, and journals are submitted online through a secure link.

For questions and more information, please contact the researcher Hoa N. Nguyen at CICOstories@gmail.com or (404) 563-2480.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study and conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

Please affirm that you are 18 or older to give your consent for participation in this study. **Please submit your online consent. Then, access the pre-interview demographic survey:**
[\[Insert link\]](#)

Appendix E

Data Collection Materials**Pre-Interview Demographic Survey**

Before your first interview, please answer a brief survey to help us understand your background.

Name (Pseudonym): _____ Date: _____

1. Gender: _____ Age: _____ Sexual Orientation: _____

2. Birthplace (city/country): _____

3. Racial identity: _____ Cultural identity: _____

4. Major: _____ Year (e.g. junior, senior): _____ University name: _____

5. Student status: Undergraduate Graduate Visa Status: Current F-1 Former F-1

6. Number of year studying in the US: _____

7. Primary language: _____ Other spoken languages: _____

8. Religious belief: _____

9. List people you consider to be a part of your family and indicate the level of closeness you have to each of them (on a scale of 1 – 6, 1 being not at all, 6 being as close as possible).

10. Explain (for each person) what makes you feel close to this person?

11. Relationship status: Single Dating Engaged Married Divorced

Other: _____

12. Please indicate (at least 3) dates and times for your first interview: _____

13. Please indicate the best email contact for you that is secure and confidential: _____

Your pre-interview demographic survey has been submitted. You will receive an email from CICOstories@gmail.com confirming your meeting date and time. We also send reminders and reimburse you for your participation via email. No other personal information will be sent.

First Interview Schedule

Thank you for talking with me today. This first interview will take about 60-90 minutes, and it will be audio recorded. You can withdraw at any point in the study if you feel uncomfortable. Please feel free to ask any questions. Before we begin, are you in a secure, private area that you confident you will not be disturbed or interrupted? In this interview, we will talk about you and your family relationships.

This first set of questions are about your family and your relationships before and after coming to the United States.

1. How would you describe your family?
 - a. How open are they to talking about deeper topics?
 - b. What is communication like in your family?
 - c. What is their general dynamic and atmosphere?
 - d. How do different family members interact with one another? Where do they live?
 - e. How might culture shape your description of family?
2. I see that you've listed particular family members you are close to on your demographic questionnaire. Would you please elaborate on your relationship with each person?
3.
 - a. How close are you to each person? How do you define this closeness?
 - b. What is your communication with person like?
 - c. How do you feel around each person? How does that person make you feel about yourself?
 - d. Being in the US, what is your relationship and interaction with each person like?
 - e. If you needed to talk to someone about an intimate issue or struggle, who do you feel comfortable talking to and how come?

Next, I'd like to ask you about your sexual identity.

4. When did you first start thinking about your sexual identity?
 - a. What thoughts and feelings were prevalent?
 - b. What stories did you begin to tell yourself about your sexual orientation?

- c. What do you think and feel about your sexual identity currently?
5. How have you decided to talk or not talk about your sexual orientation?
- a. Have you told anyone? What did you say, when, and how?
 - b. Who did you tell first, second, and so forth? How was each disclosure event?
 - c. What factors play a part in your decision of whether or not to disclose?
 - d. How did you navigate this disclosure? How was your relationships afterwards?

Next, I'd like to ask you about your cultural identity.

6. How would you describe your cultural identity?
- a. How might each family member describe their cultural identity?
 - b. How would you describe your family culture? How do they adopt or not adopt aspects of their cultural identity?
7. How does your cultural experiences shape or not shape your ideas about sexual orientation?
- a. How does cultural experience shape or not shape your family's ideas about sexual orientation? Any differences or similarities for different family members?
 - b. How does being in the United States shape your ideas about your sexual orientation?
8. How has coming to the United States shape or not shape the way you view your culture-of-origin?
- a. How has it shape or not shape your identity as a member of that culture?
 - b. How does this interplay with your sexual identity, if it does?
9. Are there other salient aspects of your culture or of your identity that we have not discussed?
10. Would you like to share any pictures, photos, songs, books, poems, movies, or TV shows that speaks to your process of navigating sexual identity in these cultural contexts? Sometimes, other forms of communication, like a picture for instance, can convey more about our experiences than words.

Second Interview Schedule

Thank you for talking with me today. This first interview will take about 60-90 minutes, and it will be audiotaped. You can withdraw at any point in the study if you feel uncomfortable. Please feel free to ask any questions. Before we begin, are you in a secure, private area that you confident you will not be disturbed or interrupted? In this interview, we will talk about your process of coming in the United States and choosing to share or not share your sexual identity.

Let's start by drawing a timeline from the time you decided to study in the United States.

1. When you first thinking about your sexual identity?
2. When did you disclose to different family members and friends on this timeline?
3. What events led up to it?
4. What events occurred afterwards?
5. How has your feelings, thoughts, and discussions about your sexual identity change throughout this timeline? At which parts did you feel most comfortable with this sexual identity?
6. How has your feelings, thoughts, and discussions about your cultural identity change throughout this timeline? At which parts did you feel most comfortable with this cultural identity?
7. How has your relationship with your family changed throughout this timeline? Any differences or similarities between each family member?
8. Are there other important events and turning points we have not placed on the timeline yet?
9. Looking at your timeline, what different needs might you have had at different time points? What would have been helpful for you during those times of need?
10. For the last part of our interview, would you please take a paper and pen or drawing pencils? Can you take a moment and draw your process of navigating sexual identity as an international student? You can be literal or abstract. There are no rules!

Debrief:

Thank you for your time and participation in this study. If you have questions or would like a summary of the results, please let me know. I will send a summary at the conclusion of the project. As discussed, the forum will remain open until the completion of the study. Afterwards, it can be continued by participants in the forum if they wish to remain connected to other participants of the study. Given the sensitivity of the topics, we have discussed, I'd like to offer the following list of resources for support.

First Journal Prompt

Thank you for participating in the first interview. Please submit a detailed journal reflection answering the following questions. You are welcome to write in the language you are most comfortable with before translating it in to English for submission. At the end of your submission, you will be asked to confirm our next meeting time and for your email so I can send you the first giftcard. If you have questions, please email and let me know. Thank you.

1. What was it like talking to me in the last interview? How does it feel to share these stories?
2. What cultural stories do you hear about LGBTQ from your home culture in comparison to the U.S. culture? What are the differences and similarities between the two?
3. How does your story align with or challenge these cultural stories?
4. What might be some ways to address the needs of LGBTQ international students?

Second Journal Prompt

Thank you for participating in the second interview. Please submit a detailed journal reflection answering the following questions. You are welcome to write in the language you are most comfortable with before translating it in to English for submission. You are also given the option to submit this journal as you did the first one or to post this journal on a private forum for all participants. The second choice offers a chance to interact with other LGBTQ international students. If you do not wish to do this, please select the first option, submit the journal, and enter your email to receive the second giftcard. If you wish to participate in the forum, the account name will be your pseudonym, and enter the password you'd like here: _____. Also, enter your email to receive confirmation that your account on the forum has been set up and to receive your giftcard. If you have questions, please email and let me know. Thank you.

1. What was it like talking to me in the last interview?
2. How does it feel to think your experiences on a timeline?
3. What advice and wisdom would you give to another LGBTQ international student?
4. What stories would you tell them?

Guidelines for Forum

This forum is meant to be a way of connecting the participants to a wider audience and community of peers who are also exploring their coming in, coming out stories. Please respect other participants in the forum. When writing, only speak from your experiences. Do not speak for anyone else. Please take space to share your story and also make space for others to join in the conversation.

Instructions:

- 1) Create a new entry, and add your second journal entry to the category “Journals”
- 2) Please continue to use your pseudonym.
- 3) After adding your journal entry, feel free to visit other’s stories.
- 4) You can reply and start a conversation thread on other’s journal entries.
- 5) You can also create a new topic or questions outside the “Journals” category.
- 6) Please keep your topics relevant and appropriate.
- 7) All forum participants are accountable for creating a respectful and inviting atmosphere.
- 8) If there is an interpersonal issue or a disrespectful comment, please let me know by emailing CICOstories@gmail.com with the problematic message.

This forum will close at the project’s completion unless participants are interested in continuing the forum. In which case, we can discuss establishing a new admin(s) to take care of the forum. My hope is to provide a starting point for the forum, but allow the forum to transform to fit your needs if you wish to continually build it.

Appendix F

Resources**GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER (GLBT) YOUTH**

- **GLBT National Youth Talk**
 - Call 1-800-246-7743 (Monday-Friday, 4pm-12 am EST/Saturday, 12pm-5pm EST)
 - [Email the GLBT National Youth Talk](#)
- **The Trevor Project**
 - Call 866-488-7386 (24/7)
 - [Live Chat](#) (Fridays 4pm- 5pm EST)

CRISIS SUPPORT

- **National Suicide Prevention**
 - 1-800-273-8255 (24/7)
- **Crisis Text Line**
 - TEXT “GO” TO 741-741 Free, 24/7, Confidential.

INTERNATIONAL RESOURCES

- Wikipedia has a [list of LGBT rights organizations](#) organized by country and region.
- [International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission](#) is an international advocacy organization that offers country-specific information.
- [International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association \(ILGA\)](#) is an international advocacy organization with regional chapters: [Asia](#), [Africa](#), [Europe](#), [the Americas and the Caribbean](#). Look at the member listings of each regional chapter to find LGBT organizations in specific countries.
- [Amnesty International](#) is an international human rights organization. Check out their [country listings](#) to find information about human rights violations against LGBT individuals in specific countries.
- [International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer Youth and Student Organization](#) is an international organization uniting LGBTQ organizations serving youth and students. Check out their member listing for organizations in specific countries.
- [GlobalGayz](#) is a website collecting travel stories about LGBT life internationally; it is an excellent source of information on GLBT life abroad.
- [This website](#) shows which university campuses across the United States have LGBT Student Centers.
- Questions about LGBT students who are applying for a student visa and their partners are addressed in this [link](#).

DATING ABUSE & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- **loveisrespect**
 - 1-866-331-9474/tty: 1-866-331-8453 (24/7)
 - [Live Chat](#) (7 days/week, 5pm-3am EST)
 - **National Domestic Violence Hotline**
 - 1-800-799-7233 (24/7)
 - [Email the National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) (24/7)
 - **RAINN: Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network**
 - 1-800-656-4673 (24/7)
 - [Live Chat with RAINN](#) (24/7)
- CUTTING/SELF INJURY**
- **Safe Alternatives**
 - Call 800-366-8288 for help.

Appendix G

Selected Example of Coding Process

Note: Narrative thematic elements were highlighted with colors, and the underlying understanding of the narrative labeled in red. Narrative structural elements were coded in parentheses and blue. Narrative dialogic elements were coded in brackets.

Shortened Coding Map

Narrative Thematic	Narrative Structural	Narrative Dialogic
Characters	Abstract (AB)	Cultural narrative
Place	Orientation (OR)	Dominant story
Time	Complication action (CA)	Subjugated story
Event	Evaluation (EV)	Counter narrative
Plot	Resolution (RE)	Alternative story
	Coda	

Date: 3/7/2016

Audio file information: Interview 1 - Zang

208 Hoa Well, when did you first start thinking about your sexual identity?

209 Zang Mm, when I was very little. Like kindergarten.
(OR)

210 Hoa Mhm.

211 Zang And that time I find out I'm the different one cause everybody's just like
(OR) (OR)

212 oh...this guy love that girl. That girl love this little guy and I just like-what? The
(CA)

213 world's going down this way? It's not guy with guy, girl with girls? And at that
(EV)

214 time I realize, oh hey I'm the different one and I start worry about it since I was
(OR) (CA)

215 so little. Like kindergarten.
(OR)

216 Hoa Right. Did you ever talk to someone then or who do you remember was the

217 first person that you told this to?

218 Zang Um, well I can't really remember this, but I know I'm a gay then. I know the
(AB)

219 word gay when I was like elementary school like fifth grade or sixth grade. No,
(OR)

220 no, no, or maybe uh first grade or second grade. Um the first time I starting to
(OR)

221 talk to somebody maybe it's a third grade of junior year and I talk...to the girl
(CA) (OR)

222 I'm really close with...yeah.
(CA) Coda

Realization of Difference

heteronormative cultural narrative

start of dominant story

572 are. You not accepting who you are. And it's time for you to move out by
 (CA)
 573 yourself um, and you know invite the friend that you want, and be as gay that
 574 you are.
 (AB) Coda

self-acceptance sup
 tely to not-include
 alternative
 stories:
 : autonomy
 self-accepter

Date: 3/28/2016

Audio file information: Interview 2 - Zang

175 Zang -- like when a time I was in China, I know some of the people are gay in my
 (OR) (CA)
 176 school but I never talk to them.
 (OR) (CA)

subjugated story:
 isolation

177 Hoa And you were scared talking to them would uh-would make you associate with
 178 them or something else?

179 Zang Um, I don't even want to have any conversation with them.
 (CA)

180 Hoa Mhm.

subjugated story:
 avoidance +
 further isolation

181 Zang But in here it's kinda like okay now. Like um, wh-when I get into the university
 Coda (OR) (CA) (OR)
 182 I feel like yeah, it's okay to talk with some people uh, some gay people.
 (CA)

counter normative
 + possible alternati

183 Hoa Yeah, and uh, what has- the- when you- since you've been here what has those
 184 experiences been like?

185 Zang From being where?

186 Hoa Since you say at the university?

187 Zang Yeah, it's just like um, cause in the university I-I study in <college>, and
 188 apparently this is America, and people more open minded and-and I try really
 (OR) (CA)
 189 hard and try my best accept myself. And it took really long time cause um, I
 (AB)
 190 hang out with um, friends who are Chinese people, so Asian and I don't really
 (CA) (OR)
 191 know they are accepted or not. So um, yeah. But now I move out by myself
 (CA)

social context shapes
 of self-concept and
 acceptance
 counter normative
 open mindedness
 in
 America
 alternative
 story:
 try to
 accept self

192 and I didn't live with them anymore. Um, yeah I used to live with a roommate
 193 was Chinese, but now I move out by myself. I- I think um, it just the process for
 194 me to really uh, um, accept who I am and I'm doing it.

Authoring facilitated acceptance
alternative story

195 Hoa How are you able to do that now given your history and background?

196 Zang Cause I don't wanna hide myself um, anymore. Cause it's really hard and it just
 197 like, a daily challenge and I have to think about um, am I act gay just now? Am

not hiding alternative story

198 I talk like a gay? I have to prevent that and I wonder too that people think I'm
 199 a straight gay and I'm a totally normal one. But that is really tired, and um,
 200 makes me really unhappy. And I don't like that. I- I know I don't like that.

burden of secrecy

201 Hoa Mhm. And since you don't like it what make you want to change that so you
 202 can be happier accepting yourself?

203 Zang Um, first of all, my friend um, some-my girlfriend, um, female friends, they
 204 told me um, it's not- not really a big deal as a gay. And I go to the gay bar and
 205 I talk to the people and I tell them what I'm concerned about, what I'm worry

counter narrative gay = not a big deal

206 about and they just told me don't worry about it. Um, even though you are so
 207 perfect, still some people gonna hate you anyway. So just be yourself. Be

not to worry counter narrative perfection of acceptance

208 happy. This is your life. Life is short. And I think um, yeah, people keep telling
 209 me that kind of information like uh, being yourself, um like make yourself
 210 happy is really important for- for you. And I said ah, I starting to accept this
 211 information and I think yeah, it's right. I want to be happy.

the most serious alternative story of happiness seeking by making self happy

212 Hoa Oh. And- d- did this happen in like 2015, is that around the time?

213 Zang Uh, actually it's this year.

Narrative Account for Coded Transcript

Note: Excerpts from the following narrative account are associated with the coded transcript in this appendix. The account weaved in elements of narrative **thematic**, **structural**, and **dialogic** analyses, identified in the parentheses throughout the narrative account. I also included analytic memos that informed my process of constructing the narrative account.

Zang's Story. In kindergarten (**time**, **orientation**), Zang started to think about his sexual identity (**event**). He noticed a recurrent narrative that everyone around him (**character**) supported the notion that guys love girls, girls love guys (**cultural narrative**). This was an ongoing message (**plot**) throughout elementary school (**orientation**). At this time, he realized he was different and worried about how others perceived him (**complicating action**).

He does and is willing to talk to a few trusted friends. Both feelings of fear and comfort accompany his process of disclosing sexual orientation. A recurrent narrative is the idea of "acting" like a girl (Analytic Memo 3, Line 5-8).

Zang first disclosed being gay (**event**) to a close friend (**character**), who stated that she had already known because he acted like a girl (**complicating action**). In response, Zang felt a mixture of comfort and fear—comfort that his friend (**character**) did not mind, and fear that others would notice his femininity and assume he was gay (**evaluation**, **cultural narrative**). Zang never told his family (**subjugated story**). Generally, he described having negative experiences (**event**) with his parents and brother (**character**), who often bullied him (**event**). Others made fun of him for “acting like a girl” (**event**). This reflects a hetero- and gender-normative narrative in the culture (**cultural narrative**). This was also the beginning of the hiding (**complicating action**). In order to not be seen as a gay person (**abstract**), Zang learned what people assumed about gay people and worked not to be discovered (**subjugated**).

Zang described a turbulent childhood in his family household (**plot**). He does not consider sharing much of his life with them (**evaluation**). As he grew up (**orientation**), Zang struggled with mental health issues (**event**). He reported having depression, and finding that counselors were not always helpful (**event**). It was clear that he made much effort to seek help (**event**), but he also worried that his negative energy burdened others (**evaluation**). He stated that counselors (**character**) who suggested that he stayed positive were missing the mark (**plot**). This was not a problem of positivity (**evaluation**). In addition to a difficult family environment, Zang discussed not wanting to be gay and hating himself (**subjugated story**).

Zang struggles with mental health issues and grew up hating himself. Amidst navigating gay identity is not having supportive family, in general (Analytic Memo 3, Line 11-12).

The dominant story of being gay means being sick, immoral, and repulsive (**cultural narrative**) was taking hold in his list (**dominant story**). He felt disgusted with himself (**dominant story**). He felt that people in society would not accept him (**subjugated story**). At the same time, Zang talked about constantly worrying about how others see him (**event**) and being exhausted from pretending to be straight (**counter narrative**). While growing up (**orientation**), Zang tried to hide by not talking (**subjugated story**) with other gay people (**character**) in China (**place**). He shared his subjugated stories of hiding, trying to act straight or normal. When sharing his story, Zang often stepped back to comment on the events that occurred (**evaluation**).

The narrative of hiding (**subjugated story**) was a strong one in Zang's story (**plot**), but this started to shift (**plot**) when he came to the United States (**place**,

complicating action). He began to meet other people (**character**) who encouraged him to be himself and strive for personal happiness (**plot, complicating action, counter narrative**). His female friends (**character**) were supportive (**event**).

Being yourself and seeking happiness is a strong message in his second interview.

His female friends in particular have been important characters in this plot of moving out, seeking happiness through self-acceptance (Memo 3, Line 13-16).

In this sense, it was important that people in his surrounding context presented counter narratives, narratives about how people will still hate you even if you are perfect (**counter narrative**) and an alternative story where gayness as not a big deal (**alternative story**). Zang also moved out of the same place (**event**) as his Chinese roommate (**character**), who he felt was not accepting of LGBT people (**evaluation**). The step to move out was an important one for Zang (**plot; complicating action**). He talked to people at gay bars (**place**) and his accepting friends (**character**). There are times in the conversation where he started to feel hopeless again (**evaluation**).

I enjoyed talking with Zang. He oscillates between hopelessness and some sheer hope that his education and economical independence will help him better his experiences. He's trying hard, I can see that in his talking to friends in the United States and in China. He still feels very uncomfortable (Analytic Memo 3, Line 1-4).

Appendix H

Selected Analytic Memos**Auxy, Memo 1, Line 2-6**

Talking with Auxy got me thinking about how when talking about these narratives and stories, we can't help, but recognize the differing layers of privilege and oppression. He brings up a good point that maybe the differences between the experiences of people who are of a sexual minority is because they have different layers of privileges and oppression in regards to the other parts of their identity.

Huang, Memo 1, Line 3-9

First thought I have is the word identify is very sort of Western individualistic term so I, I constantly talk about sexual identity. Uh how do you identify? What is- how do you identify with culture um, I'm starting to rethink that word a bit, be more careful in my usage of it. Uh, because it is more individualistic and may not fit for people of different cultures. Second thought I have is that I added the "what if" question. What if you didn't come the U.S. and you were in the country of origin and how would your sexual identity development be different or similar?

Aditya, Memo 1, Line 2-9

One of things that Aditya makes me think about is how when people who are of any kind of minority status, but they are also privileged in another way, like Aditya is a gay male, so he has access to male privilege umm but not in terms of being a sexual minority. So, but he recognizes sort of male privilege. He recognizes the ways in which people are unfair toward women and the patriarchal society. So I just f- it feels like there is this, this kind of parallel aspect of when you are, even if you are gay with male privilege, m- uh gay person who has male privilege, because you are oppressed in other ways, he is able to use that access that maybe to understand his male privilege.

Huang, Memo 2, Line 6-13

He hasn't been here in the US much longer than other people, um, but I like that he talked about uh, even when he was in China he had experiences with um, sort of an inspiring gay couple he knew in China before he came to the US. So the start of his journey to accepting himself and understanding himself began before he actually came to the US. He started to explore his sexual identity though the internet when he was in China, and that's how he met them, so I think this another evidence that shows how helpful online communities can be when done in a safe confidential correct way to help people who are just, just not comfortable enough to really connect uh, in person with people about such sensitive issues.

Kenji, Memo 2, Line 2-5

His story went from eating disorders, depression, suicidal thoughts to coming out to his family, finding the love of his life. It's such a story of resilience and strength. And I think the ability, first of all, the ability he had as a therapist to navigate those conversations with his family was important, and then second of all, his family loving him and putting him first really stood out, as well.

Huang, Memo 2, Line 35-39

The other thing that is a beginning thought of mine is the importance of separating the idea of individual/collectivist as being on the same spectrum or category of independent/dependent. I think sometimes people think if you're individualistic, it means you're more independent or something and I don't. Something doesn't fit right with me about that assumption. I don't know, I have to think more about it so, that's all.

Auxy, Memo 3, Line 3-8

Auxy talked about privilege. The privilege of not having to think about his sexual orientation, not having to think about who to disclose to, how to disclose. He recalled always feeling comfortable being who he is. His understanding of privilege struck me in our conversation, as he emphasized how people want to be accepted for being LGBTQ, but eventually what we really want is to be seen as a full person, with the LGBTQ identity as being only one facet of who we are.

Zang, Memo 3, Line 4-9

Zang learned from a young age about gay identity, and the cultural norm around relationships. He doesn't have a lot of support from his family. He does and is willing to talk to a few trusted friends. Both feelings of fear and comfort accompany his process of disclosing sexual orientation. A recurrent narrative is the idea of "acting" like a girl. Zang discuss feeling uncomfortable if people notice his femininity and assumes that he is gay from this. This also reflects a gender normative narrative, and contributes to his fear of being discovered.

Jean Paul, Memo 3, Line 5-8

Family. It's so interesting how family is such a huge component in most of these students' experiences. That's as overlooked part in terms of international students, especially LGBTQ international students which we barely have any research on, but much of it is on individual coping. And here we have family playing a huge role that is being ignored.

Appendix I

Selected Reflexive Memos**Research Design, Memo 1, Line 5-10**

I talked with a gay international student today about the fear of reaching out to the larger LGBTQ community. *If I come out and try to find friends in the LGBTQ community, what if these people don't accept me because of my cultural differences, and then my friends from the cultural community rejects me because of my sexual identity.* If things go badly, the student will risk losing both communities. The risk may be too much for students who are learning about a new cultural context and learning environment.

Research Design, Memo 2, Line 1-8

Born in Vietnam and raised from a young age in Atlanta, GA, I am a 1.5 generation Vietnamese immigrant, though I relate to the experiences of being a third culture kid. A third culture kid is a concept that describes the experience of those living in-between various cultural worlds and create one of their own—a third culture. The idea of “home” can be complex and difficult to pinpoint for me as a third culture kid. This lens of home is guiding my thoughts about international students, and I’m curious how they construct the narrative of home and belongingness. I also talked with one of the AcrossBorders@VT members about homesickness and how racism gets in the way of cultivating home in the United States.

Victor, Memo 1, Line 3-9

We spent an hour and a half just trying to get connected to the internet, so that was a big issue and then Victor had a lot of questions for me, like who I am, what makes me interested in this topic, where I’m from, does my family know about my sexual orientation. So, I tried to answer umm a bit but without over sharing in a way that would overshadow his story and experiences. It could also be related to us both being Vietnamese. I know that I need to be careful not to assume that I understand his experiences though, given the unique relationship between the individual and their culture means we both probably have entirely different experiences.

Kenji, Memo 1, Line 1-7

This memo is for the conversation with Kenji, umm who is also a therapist. So, this was really interesting. He is [pause] is interesting in that his occupation plays into how his sexual identity has developed, as well. And he talked about umm working or getting to know people who were really really religious and really struggled with working LGBTQ people in the therapy field and how he kind of maneuvered that. Umm. So he made me think about how the different ways in which the LGBTQ international students navigate their sexual identity in their work place or occupation.

Isabella, Memo 1, Line 1-6

Oh my goodness! SHE IS ME! [laughs] Not really, or I'M HER! I don't know. This was an interesting interview for me because the things she was saying, I felt like I could really connect or relate to so I had to be really careful with not putting my own biases. I talked less in this interview because I was afraid I was going to impose my own views on her. The more she talked the more I feel the same way or I feel so similarly. And so I just talked a little bit less and asked more. I did more questioning and trying to turn all of my statements into questions with her.

Darla, Memo 1, Line 2-5

Great! Love her! Thought she was very open. Similarities to Auxe's interview that she was like never had any issues. In fact, she said that [laugh] she felt like US was even more conservative. Talked a lot about our umm little issues here in the US, which I really enjoyed hearing her lens.

Yu Chen, Memo 2, Line 11-15

So the other thing that kind of became into issue is that I felt a bit of the therapist in me during this interview. I wanted to help her understand her sexuality more. I wanted to help her feel more comfortable with it, and it wasn't really my place to do that. Um, uh I think I made her feel as comfortable as possible, and I gave her a list of resources. At the end of the day, I'm a researcher in this context.

Ling, Memo 2, Line 18-22

I felt like she was like very open in this one and less nervous, and she actually challenged me on some things too. When I asked, especially when I asked about cultural identity, she just sort of said, "well you know that's not something that like fits, I'm not just a Chinese person. I don't necessarily prefer people to view me in that way or form." So interesting! I feel it's a good sign when she is able to let me know that I am off the mark.

Huang, Memo 2, Line 2-9

Um, kinda sad I'm not talking to Huang again. I just love him and I didn't even look at his age until now, and he's the oldest person in the group so far. He's in his 30's, and I'm thinking no wonder he has just this level of maturity and understanding that I didn't see as much with the other participants. Probably age contributes to that, though not necessarily. That sounds like a potential bias of mine to keep in check.

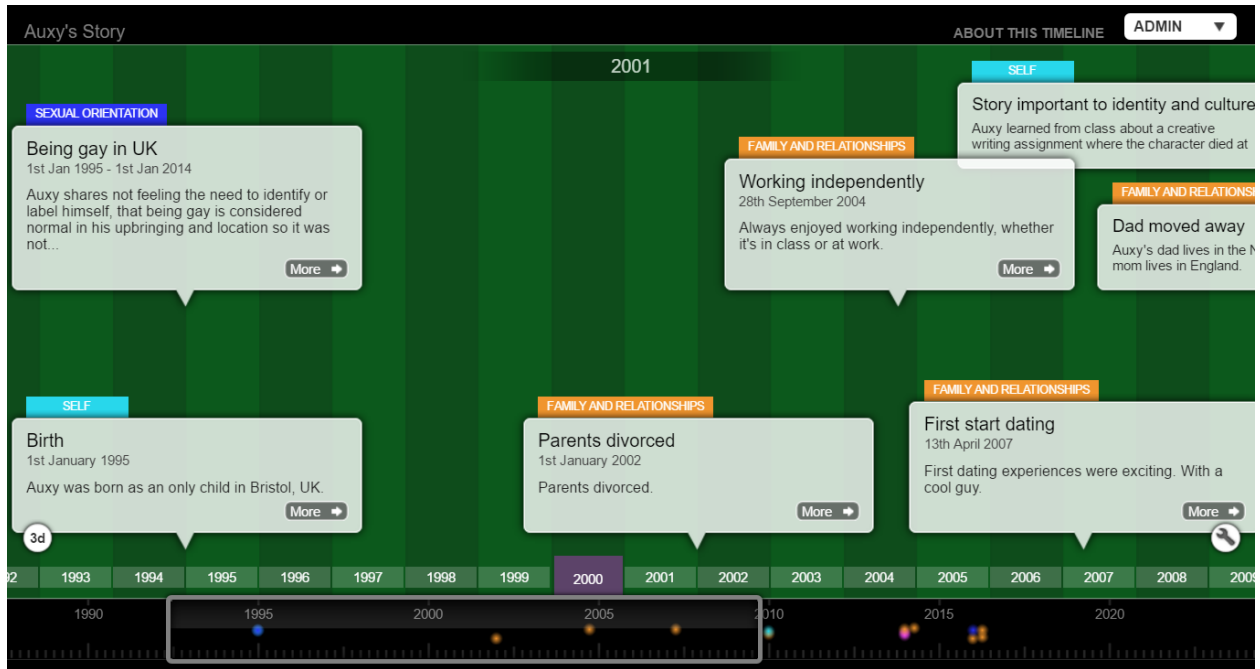
Darla, Memo 3, Line 25-29

She was excited about seeing the dissertation. That makes me excited too. I'm glad to have had such a big diversity in this group. I feel like it changes the dominant story about international students as being a monolithic group, as well. It's also challenging the narratives of previous projects done on this very same topic.

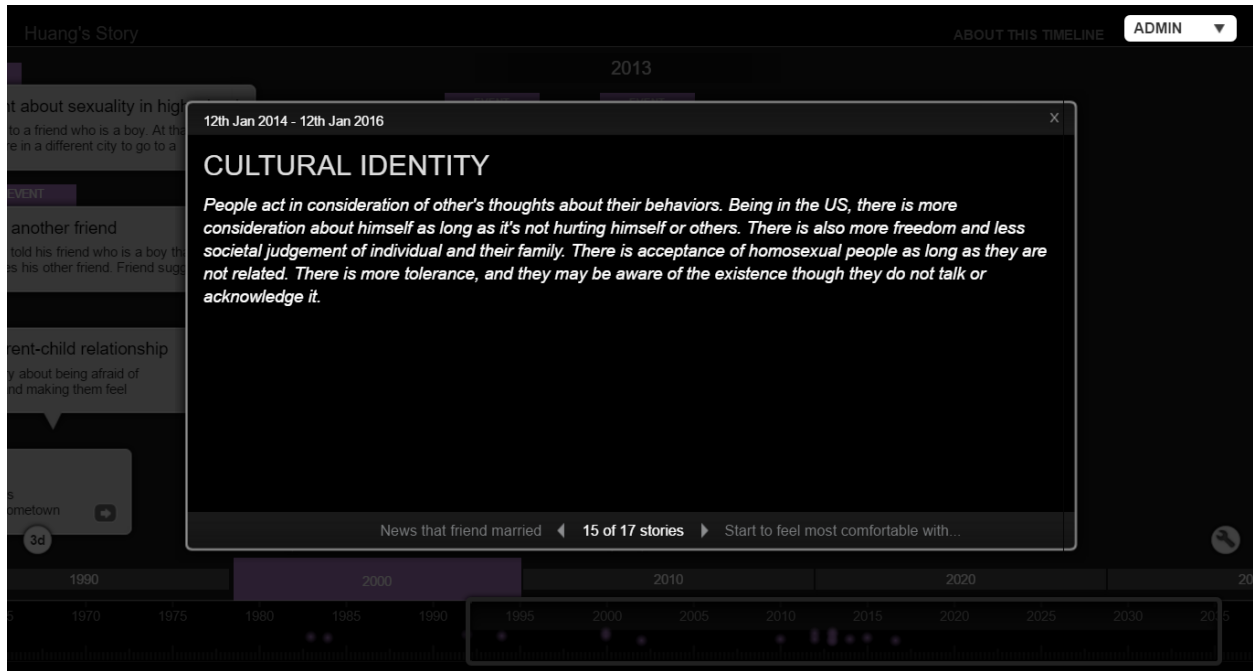
Appendix J

Examples of Timeline

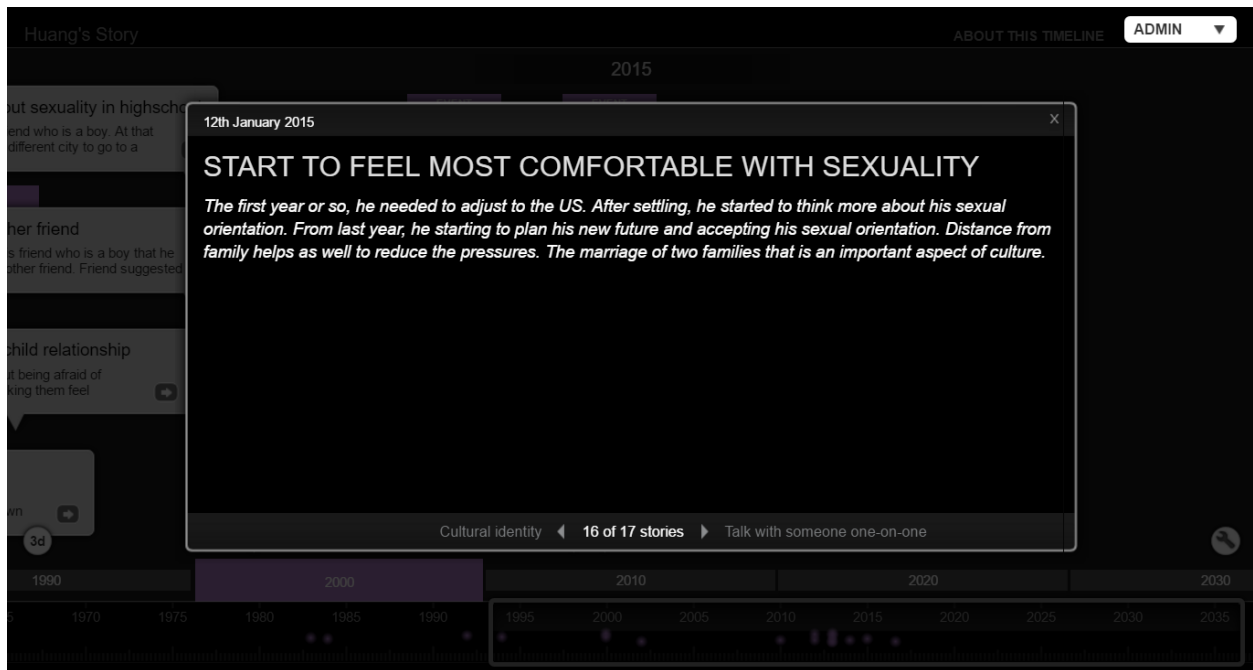
Auxy's story is represented in the timeline below, starting from his birth in 1995 to current events in his experience. He also added his possible plans for moving in the future. The timeline program allowed me to color-code events that were related to one another and slide the bar below to move forward in time.



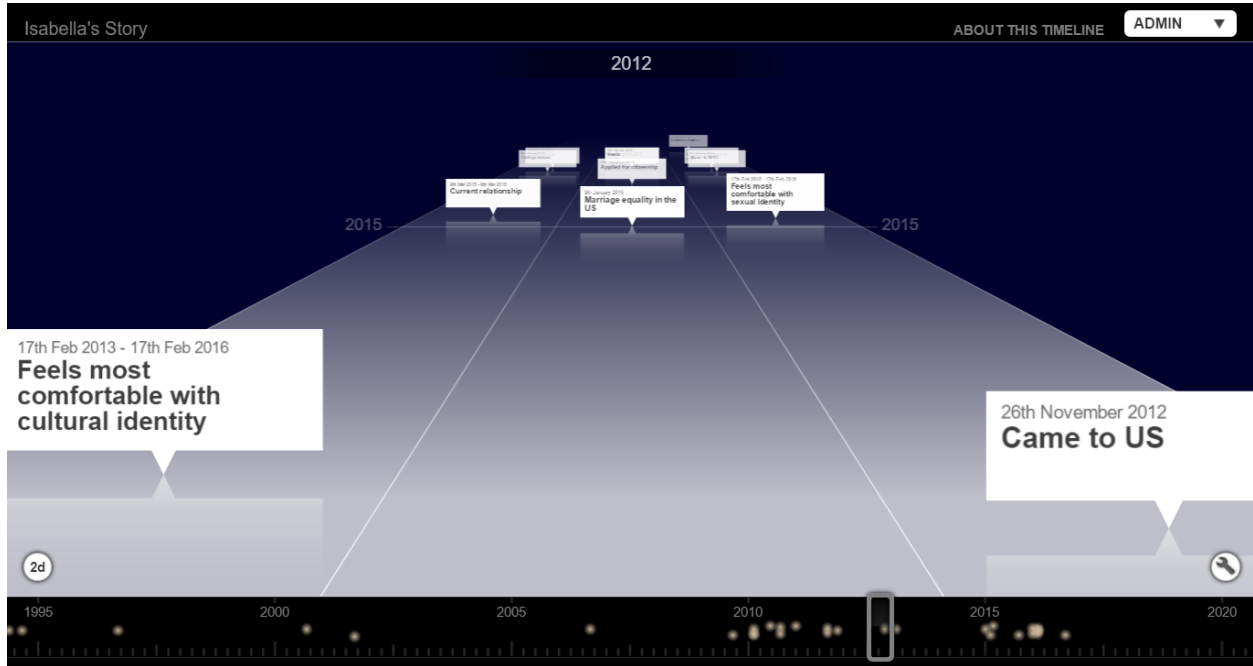
Huang’s story is represented in the examples below. Clicking any event on the timeline opens up the event for a fuller description. Here, Huang talks about his cultural identity as shaped by being in the United States between 2014 and 2016.



In 2015, he started to feel most comfortable, thus far, with his sexuality, after having some time to adjust to the United States culture. Distance from family helped reduce the pressure, given that the union of two families was an important aspect of his culture.



The timeline could also be viewed in 3D, as exemplified in Isabella’s story below. After we created the timeline, I showed the participants this 3D view and asked them to fill in any additional gaps. I believe seeing their stories in different ways chronologically helped initiate further conversations about the temporal dimension of their experiences.



For Isabella, she started to feel comfortable with her Bulgarian, third culture kid identity before feeling comfortable with her sexual identity. Isabella was a politically-conscious person and noted how supporting marriage equality was an important event in her experiences.

