Article

OJED
OPEN JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Journal of International Students
Volume 13, Issue 2 (2023), pp. 95-113
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)
ojed.org/jis

LGBTQIA+ International Students and Socioemotional Well-being: Impact of Intersectionality on Perceived Experiences and Campus Engagement

Andrew S. Herridge
University of Southern Mississippi, USA

Mary Ann Bodine Al-Sharif
University of Alabama at Birmingham, USA

Mi Chelle Leong
Louisiana Tech University, USA

Hugo A. García
Texas Tech University, USA

ABSTRACT

International students are more likely to experience mental health issues and increased stress. Mental health is often surrounded by negative societal stigmas that act as barriers to seeking support and tend to lead to greater mental health concerns. International students tend to seek socioemotional support from other international student peers rather than seeking counseling services. However, this study shows that LGBTQIA+ international students were less likely to seek socioemotional support from other international student peers due to fear of their sexual orientation being discovered and their families finding out about their identity. This study examines how LGBTQIA+ international students talk about their experiences on and off campus in relation to their socioemotional well-being. Specifically, this study sought to better understand the complexities of LGBTQIA+ students' identities and the challenges they faced in terms of their socioemotional well-being. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: Identity Development, International Students, Intersectionality, LGBTQIA+, Socioemotional Well-Being

According to the Institute of International Education [IIE] (2021), despite the significant decline in the number of new international students, the number of existing international students decreased by only 3% compared to previous academic years. The transition of international students to the United States has been shown to be more challenging than before due to COVID-19 (Pham & Shi, 2020). While the transition can be challenging for any international student, those who identify as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+ -- the plus ensures the inclusion of the full spectrum of sexuality and gender identities) community may face increased challenges and marginalization. In addition, they may also face forms of discrimination and hostility due to being from a different country (Lee, 2010).

While there are studies that examine the experience of LGBTQIA+ domestic students and international students, there are no studies that examine LGBTQIA+ international students in terms of their socioemotional well-being on campus. Therefore, this study provides an understanding of how LGBTQIA+ international students interact with the campus environment, how they perceive the campus climate, and what impact their interactions and perceptions have on their performance and overall academic outcomes. Specifically, this study seeks to understand the complexities of LGBTQIA+ students' identities and the challenges associated with their socioemotional well-being. The following research question guides our study:

In what ways, if at all, do LGBTQIA+ international students discuss their daily experiences on and off campus in relation to their socioemotional well-being?

Within this work, the term LGBTQIA+ will be used as an overarching term for sexual orientation. However, at times, the acronym or term utilized in the literature will be used to accurately reflect the original research cited.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the United States, "being an international student" is considered a minoritized identity (Mahmood & Burke, 2018). International students are more likely to experience mental health issues and increased stress often caused by financial worries, discrimination, language barriers, and acculturation difficulties (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Gorrochategui, 2019; Herridge et al., 2019, Kim et al., 2015; Lértora et al., 2021; Leong, 2015; Oba & Pope, 2013; Pham & Shi, 2020). However, LGBTQIA+ international students in the United States face unique experiences due to the intersectionality of the identities they hold in regard to "developing their sexual identity, having questions related to coming out, forming intimate relationships, and coping with health-related problems" (Oba & Pope, 2013, p. 186). Despite the similarities, LGBTQIA+ international students are less likely to engage socially and to have an established support system for developing and navigating their sexual identity compared to their domestic counterparts (Oba & Pope, 2013).

International students report higher levels of stress than domestic U.S. students but may avoid seeking help due to cultural norms that negatively view mental health and counseling (Crocket & Hayes, 2011; Gorrochategui, 2019; Kim et al., 2015; Li et al., 2013; Suh et al., 2015), which act as barriers to seeking support and lead to worsening mental health issues (Goodwill & Zhou, 2020). Herridge et al. (2019) and Lértora et al. (2021) found that LGB international students were less likely to seek socioemotional support from

other international students due to fear of their sexual orientation being discovered by their families.

Socioemotional well-being consists of both social and emotional skills to promote feelings of being secure, valued, supported within a particular environment (Berger et al., 2010), social and personal development (Mehešová, 2017), and higher levels of academic achievement (Reinert, 2019). Social emotional learning is the "process of integrating thinking, feeling, and behaving in order to become aware of the self and of others, make responsible decisions, and manage one's own behaviors and those of others" (Brackett & Rivers, 2014, p. 371).

First-year college students with healthy levels of emotional and social interaction are more likely to be academically successful (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Muller et al., 2006). Within an educational setting, socioemotional well-being can increase feelings of being welcomed and a part of a campus community (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). Additionally, student involvement on campus tends to increase students' levels of satisfaction with the institution and campus environment, which leads to increased overall academic performance (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003).

With socioemotional well-being primarily focusing on secondary education (Berger et al., 2010; Mehešová, 2017; Reinert, 2019), within postsecondary education, it is often catered to as an intervention (Reinert, 2019) for specific students rather than as a strategy for all students enrolled. Students experience improved physical and mental health when socioemotional well-being is incorporated into higher education settings (Reinert, 2019). This matters because college students are found to experience higher levels of depression (Mehešová, 2017).

Social problems, such as relationships, identity development, family, or finances, are the factors that cause most mental health issues seen among postsecondary students in addition to academic factors (Fagan, 1994; Stocker & Gallagher, 2019). LGBTQIA+ individuals are two to three times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than heterosexual individuals (Davies et al., 2018; Iacono, 2019; National LGBT Health Education Center, 2018), which hinders the ability of marginalized communities to persist in higher education. Anxiety and depression can occur due to negative social stigmas and microaggressions toward sexuality. Sexual orientation is considered "an aspect of social identity or position that could, in tandem with particular social environments, contribute to unequal health outcomes […] and not just a predictor of disease" (Davies et al., 2018, p. 2). These differences can lead to different educational outcomes.

In many countries, homosexuality continues to be punishable by imprisonment, torture, or death (Human Rights Campaign [HRC], 2015; Simmons, 2014). Even when living in a country where homosexuality is legal, discrimination and stigmas derived from politics can cause an increase in negative mental health among LGBTQ individuals (Davies et al., 2018). Muñoz et al. (2018) found that after the 2016 U.S. presidential election, four out of five international students who identified as Muslim or LGBT reported increased anxiety.

Holding multiple intersecting identities (Herridge et al., 2019; Lértora et al., 2021), international students engage in identity development in the United States (Metro-Roland, 2018). Cultural differences can initially lead to stress as students attempt to feel a sense of belonging that is similar to their home country. However, by engaging with domestic

students, international students could further develop their identity and find similarities (Metro-Roland, 2018).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework selected for this study was the intersectional model of multiple dimensions of identity (IMMDI). The IMMDI was developed by Susan R. Jones, Elisa S. Abes, and Stephen John Quaye for inclusion in Jones and Abes' (2013, p. 161) book *Identity Development of College Students*. The model builds from Jones and McEwen's (2000) Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI) and Jones, Abes, and McEwen's (2007) Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Jones & Abes, 2013). Jones and Abes (2013) noted that the MMDI and RMMDI models could be strengthened by applying other theoretical frameworks, such as intersectionality, queer theory, and critical race theory. In particular,

> The MMDI and the RMMDI were first drawn with intersecting identities as the underlying premise, and points of congruence exist between intersectionality and the MMDI, such as the emphasis on context, the attention to identify salience, and the assumption of multiple social identities. (Jones & Abes, 2013, p. 157)

While studies on intersectionality have mainly focused on race, class, and gender (Castiello-Jones et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Walby et al., 2012), recent expansion in the interpretation of intersectionality has included sexuality, religion, ethnicity and more (Castiello-Jones et al., 2013; Jones & Abes, 2013; McCall, 2005). Jones and Abes (2013) added that the intersectionality of identity must be examined with consideration of the influences of the environment, which is bound by intersecting systems of power.

Therefore, the IMMDI provides two levels of analysis – micro (individual) and macro (structural) (Jones & Abes, 2013). At the micro level, an individual's social constructs of identity are identified along with the ways in which they intersect with one another. At the macro level, structures of power found within one's environment are recognized, such as racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism. The intersections of these structures of power in relation to an individual's social constructs of identity provide an awareness of not only their interconnectedness but also the impact of one's environment upon their perceptions of self. IMMDI recognizes that everyone has a core identity – central knowledge of self – and that there is fluidity between their social constructs of identity, allowing differing aspects of an individual's identity to present more predominantly depending upon the environment and with whom they interact. Likewise, between macro and micro levels is a filter that aids in the meaning-making process (Jones & Abes, 2013).

METHOD

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was selected as the qualitative methodology utilized to investigate the ways in which LGBTQIA+ international students talk about their experiences on and off campus in relation to their socioemotional well-being. CDA is rooted in critical theory and critical linguistics (Fairclough, 1989; Rasmussen, 1996;

Wodak, 2001). CDA investigates the meaning-making process by looking at how discourse reveals power struggles and inequities (van Dijk, 2003), as well as identifying ways in which individuals are erased and/or silenced within discourse (Rogers, 2011). Therefore, CDA can also be utilized as a way of identifying a need for social action and/or advocacy (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997: Wodak, 2001).

Research Team

The research team consisted of four individuals – one graduate student and three faculty members who reside in the southwestern and southeastern regions of the United States. Three of our research team members are currently at R1 public research institutions, and one member is at an R2 public research institution. One faculty member identifies as queer and is a cisgender American man who studied abroad as a secondary and postsecondary student. Another faculty member is a cisgender man who identifies as both binational and bicultural due to his upbringing in both the United States and Mexico. The third faculty member identifies as a cisgender American woman and has served as an administrator over international student services, a PDSO, and participated in three study abroad opportunities during her own academic journey. The graduate student is a Malaysian international student working on her doctoral degree in psychology. The use of a research team increased trustworthiness and provided triangulation within the analysis process (Schwandt, 2007). To control for bias, the research team utilized critical self-reflection and reflexive practices (i.e., they utilized a careful plan for data collection and analysis such as consultation and review on research practices and data collection from multiple sources – a variety of individuals from different regions of the world). To control groupthink, a heterogeneous research team was utilized. Team members were allowed to challenge each other's interpretations from data analysis and assigned different tasks to complete in the research process. The research team received appropriate IRB review and approval for this study.

Participant Selection & Recruitment

Participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling based on set characteristics (Merriam, 2009). Specifically, individuals had to be enrolled either as an undergraduate or graduate student, identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, and possess an F-1 student visa. The research team advertised weekly to elicit participation through an institution's announcement listserv, emailed requests to all international center directors at public institutions within the state where recruitment was conducted and shared a flyer through the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals research email listserv for Canada and the United States. An online screening form was utilized for interested prospective participants who expressed interest in the study. Prospective participants had to meet initial demographic requirements as mentioned above and be willing to participate in a 60-minute audio-recorded interview session.

Data Collection

In total, eight participants were identified for this study. To protect participant identities, pseudonyms were assigned and are indicated along with demographic information -- gender identity, sexual orientation, college level classification, region of origin, institutional type, and Carnegie classification of the region of the United States in Table 1. Open text boxes were provided to allow participants to provide or describe the identity they held based on recommendations from Zimmerman and Herridge (2018; 2022). Participants were given the option to complete the interview face-to-face or through a Skype video conferencing system. Six interviews were conducted face-to-face, and two were conducted by Skype video conferencing. One faculty and the graduate student team members conducted all interviews. Interviews were semistructured, recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Two research team members alternated comparing reviewed transcriptions with the audio recording to ensure accuracy. Member checking was utilized. Each participant received an email with their full transcript and was given a two-week period to review and provide any feedback for corrections.

Table 1: Participant demographics and geographical locations

Participant Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Sexual Orient.	College Level Classification	Int. Region of Origin	Institution Type	Carnegie U.S. Region
Charuka	Female	Pansexual Bisexual	Undergraduate	Southeast Asia	4-year Public	Southwest
Paulo	Male	Gay	Undergraduate	Latin America	4-year Public	Southwest
Patrícia	Female	Gay Asexual	Undergraduate	Latin America	4-year Public	Southwest
Baheela	Female	Bisexual	Undergraduate	Southwest Asia	2-year Public	Southwest
Estuardo	Male	Bisexual	Undergraduate	Latin America	4-year Public	Southwest
Reyansh	Male	Bisexual	Graduate	South Asia	4-year Public	Southwest
Luis	Male	Gay	Graduate	Latin America	4-year Public	Southwest
Mahin	Female	Bisexual	Graduate	Southwest Asia	4-year Public	Southwest

Analysis

Intertextuality was utilized for the analysis of this study. Intertextuality represents the ways in which texts intersect with other texts through differing aspects of language, such as repetitions and linguistics (Kristeva, 1980). The intersection of varying texts or discourse creates *intertexts* that can reveal power structures, meanings held by society, and social problems (Fairclough, 1992). Aligned with IMMDI (Jones & Abes, 2013), an intertextual analysis will aid in examining macrolevels of power revealed within the discourse, as well as the ways in which participants' social constructs of identity, microlevels, intersect with one another and power systems within society. Intertextuality as a method of analysis views text or discourse from two differing axes (Kristeva, 1980).

Horizontally, the authors and readers are connected through the discourse, and vertically, each text or discourse is connected to the other texts or discourse being analyzed. For this research, the authors were the participants, and the readers were the researchers. The researchers' interactions with the authors' work created a horizontal analysis looking at power structures, silenced voices, and calls for social action. Then, as participants' discourse was examined against each other – vertical analysis – the interdependence or *intertexts* were revealed. Barthes (1974) referred to intertexts as a "weaving of voices" (p. 20) in which five different types of voices/codes could evolve – "the Voice of Empirics" (proairetic codes – determine cause and effect), "the Voice of the Person" (semic codes – connotations that help to define the discourse), "the Voice of Science" (cultural codes – reveals cultural order/truths or what is considered common knowledge), "the Voice of Truth" (hermeneutic codes – reveals existing enigmas/mysteries), "the Voice of Symbol" (symbolic codes – often reinforces dominant culture and exposes conflict) (p. 21). As the intertexts evolved in relation to these five voices, they were coded and placed within a chart. From this process, two overarching themes evolved. These overarching themes were then reviewed again in relation to the text to reveal subthemes that are further discussed in the findings of this work. In alignment with CDA, the themes and subthemes were then examined in relation to the resources provided by participants' campuses, their campus environments, and the community environments in which their campuses were located to better contextualize the experiences noted within their discourse.

FINDINGS

This study examined the complex identities and experiences of international LGBTQIA+ students in terms of their socioemotional well-being through the lens of the IMMDI (Jones & Abes, 2013). The results indicate that international LGBTQIA+ students are often impacted by those with whom they interact and the need to continually negotiate an insider/outsider sense of belonging.

Navigating Peer Engagement Through Discourse

Participants engaged with their peers on campus in sororities and fraternities, academic and social clubs, intermural sports, and athletic events. Off campus, participants reported engagement at local restaurants and clubs. According to IMMDI (Jones & Abes, 2013), our environments are bound by intersecting systems of power that can influence identity development and impact the ways in which we interact. While prior research (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003; Muller et al., 2006) suggests that social interactions can lead to increased positive outcomes, due to power issues, not all participants felt comfortable engaging in discourse with their peers.

Challenging Conversations with U.S. Peers

All students need to feel secure, valued, and supported within their environments to maintain socioemotional well-being (Berger et al., 2010; Mehešová, 2017; Reinert, 2019). Unfortunately, not all LGBTQIA+ international students share these feelings, nor do they

trust their peers on campus and within their community environments. Paulo shared the following experience with a Christian campus ministry group:

> Here there are a lot of very Christian, conservative students which I have the feeling sometimes, I have to be careful with who [I] talk. …They are just trying to convert me…
>
> I also have the feeling that I have to be careful who [I] talk to about being gay or things like that because they wouldn't like it… there are like this little nuisance about... that's wrong [referring to differing sexual identities]...and things in between that make me think that I wouldn't necessarily tell them that I'm gay because they would then act weird toward me afterwards.

Christianity in the United States and on our college and university campuses is the majority religious representation (Pew Report Center, 2019, 2020) and, as such, a system of power. According to Tocqueville (2010), great power derives from individuals acting as a collective majority. Following the IMMDI (Jones & Abes, 2013), Paulo's sexual identity intersects within an environment that promotes a heterosexual Christian majority system of power. Bodine Al-Sharif and Hassan Zadeh's (2020) research confirms that religion is both an individualistic identity and a macrosystem of power and, as such, can be both empowering and oppressive depending on the context of the environment. Because Paolo did not identify as Christian and was told "that's wrong" in reference to his sexual identity, the intersections of his sexual identity at the micro level and the heterosexual religious majority at the macro level created a space of oppression that contributed to his marginalization.

CDA provides a lens for identifying the ways in which individuals are erased and/or silenced within discourse (Rogers, 2011). Baheela experienced bierasure (Barker, 2015) when interacting with her U.S. peers. She noted, "I have like acquaintances, and I definitely do not tell my acquaintances anything about my sexual orientation, which has a lot to do with the fact that being bisexual, people do not think… that is an orientation." Therefore, she often misidentifies publicly to protect her sexual identity. She stated, "Therefore, it is very hard to kind of fit in anywhere; so, I feel like if you're bisexual you kind of end up just not saying what you are, or you just end up identifying as straight." She also shared that she feared expressing her sexual identity,

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

Baheela also experienced a power dynamic based on the intersections of her sexual orientation at the microlevel and how she perceived her heterosexual U.S. peers – the majority – at the macro level would respond to her identity. Within the IMMDI, there is a recognition of fluidity between an individual's social constructs of identity that allows differing aspects of identity to present more predominantly depending upon the environment and with whom they interact (Jones & Abes, 2013). Baheela felt unsafe within her environment due to perceptions of how she felt her U.S. peers would talk about her identity. Therefore, she hid her sexual orientation while letting a more normed construct of

identity – heterosexual, female – present through gender performativity – the act or performance of a gender (Butler, 2006).

Reyansh credited living alone to his feelings of safety. He stated, "maybe…being alone here, living alone here maybe that just helps." He also shared that he felt "more open to experiment here" and that he had "more confidence because there's no one to judge here [when living alone]." For Reyansh, living alone provided safety, but his involvement on campus provided a level of satisfaction toward the campus environment (Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). However, Reyansh stated that when venturing into the community, he had a negative experience while visiting a local church. He noted,

> The people in general say I go to this church here and I didn't know they would be having sermons against it [nonheterosexual identities], but they had a sermon which was bashing the LGBTQ community and that was the last day I went there.

Reyansh, like Paulo, experienced the intersections of both individual (micro) and structural (macro) levels of oppression based on his experience within a Christian community environment. Jones and Abes (2013) noted that the intersections of these structures of power in relation to an individual's social constructs of identity bring an awareness of not only their interconnectedness but also the impact of one's environment upon their perceptions of self. The "bashing" of the LGBTQ community within the sermon was perceived as equivalent to a "bashing" of Reyansh's personal identity.

Estuardo noted that it was not his sexual orientation that impacted his experiences with his U.S. peers, but his Latin American identity and international status. Students with multiple intersecting identities may face discrimination and oppression based on all the identities that they hold (Harley et al., 2002) that could impact their mental health (Crockett & Hayes, 2011). Estuardo expressed that,

> Students are okay with you being gay and the students don't really mind about your sexuality, but more about who you are. So, but there's still a little bit… they don't really care about your sexuality, but they're a little bit racist.

Similarly, Luis felt that his international status influenced how he was perceived by his U.S. peers. He shared that "when you are an international student…you're an illegal, an alien here...there are few friends in a new country; so, you have to…also know the culture." CDA helps to better understand that the underlying concern in Luis's statement comes from the growing racial/ethnic and nationalistic tensions within the United States that have evolved during and since the 2016 presidential election (Muñoz et al., 2018). Despite his concerns, he also shared that the university had been supportive. He noted, "The university has been very helpful …because they help me through the transition. We have different orientations to get to know better the way of life in the United States." He also shared,

> What impact[s] me the most is how conservative it is here. I, well, I used to live in a city, an urban area, yeah, people here tend to be more conservative and it's the most shock[ing] things that I can say right now about that.

Estuardo and Luis recognized how the structures of power within their environments were interconnected with their own national identities (Jones & Abes, 2013) and resulted in a negative impact on their socioemotional well-being. This is not surprising when considering how the U.S. political environment has changed international students'

feelings of acceptance in the United States (Muñoz et al., 2018). Through the lens of CDA (van Dijk, 2003), we can see that the U.S. political environment has created inequities for these LGBTQIA+ international students in their feelings of acceptance/rejection and inclusion/exclusion, which can lead to a sense of (non)belonging.

Challenging Conversations with International Peers

International LGBTQIA+ students in the United States are surrounded by U.S. peers, but they are also provided the opportunity to meet and interact with other international students, including students from their home countries. Research tells us that international students are more likely to seek socioemotional support from other international students rather than counseling services (Crockett & Hayes, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2007); however, this may not always be a safe option when international students also identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ community and come from countries where homosexuality is illegal (Davies et al., 2018). Mahin shared a negative experience she had interacting with international students from her home country. She noted,

> I had some issues with some of my friends here, and they were [Southwest Asian] students here. I told one of my friends about my sexual orientation and many bad things happened to me…he told many [Southwest Asian] people, and, like, they started talking behind me; so, it's not about [the city/community] or whatever, it's just [Southwest Asians].

Reyansh shared a similar comment noting that American peers are not as judgmental as international peers. He stated, "I mean apart from the international students. I know I'm pretty sure that none of the Americans would judge me." This serves as a reminder that interactions with international students from one's home country and other countries can at times be challenging and prevent some LGBTQIA+ international students from seeking socioemotional support due to fear and judgment of their sexual identities (Herridge et al., 2019). This indicates that power dynamics can change within an environment based on who is sharing the space (Jones & Abes, 2013).

Insider/Outsider Sense of Belonging

Participants were asked to discuss the barriers/challenges that they faced on their campuses or within their communities based on their identities as LGBTQIA+ international students. Participants shared that they struggled to fit-in and experienced differing forms of discrimination. They felt like outsiders due to both their international identity status and as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. They also experienced discrimination as insiders from individuals who were native to their home countries due to their sexual orientations and for some non/religious identities that differed from their native peers. To establish a sense of belonging on their campuses and in their local communities, participants would often modify their own behaviors to create ways of coping. Yao (2015) argued that a sense of belonging is vital for international students' success. A sense of belonging provides feelings of value, respect, acceptance, care, and inclusion (Strayhorn, 2012). Because "international students are not part of the dominant campus culture due to their different cultural backgrounds and temporary citizenship status" (Yao, 2015, p. 8),

they may experience a lower sense of belonging than their domestic peers. This can be compounded by the intersections of multiple social constructs of identity that fall outside of the normed majority.

Modified Behavior

When asked what impact their personal experiences had on their involvement on campus and within the local community, participants noted they had modified their behaviors by distancing themselves from individuals who presented as racist, limiting interactions and at times, holding back from sharing their true identities. They utilized the fluidity of their identities (Jones & Abes, 2013) to shift from one identity to the next based on their environment and their interactions with those within it – protecting their sexual orientation, national identity, and/or international status.

Charuka noted that although "for the most part, I'm surrounded by great people," she will distance herself from racist people. Similarly, Mahin shared that she stopped going to the Southwest Asian events so that she did not experience judgment by her fellow Southwest Asian peers. Mahin shared,

> I don't go to the [Southwest Asian] student events because I feel they are judging me. I have to then pretend, like, I'm different. … whenever I go to, like, something, with [Southwest Asians], I wear more makeup or whatever. … I think it's just a feeling of being alone, or alienated, or being a minority and then not feeling safe, like having more stress and anxiety.

Baheela also noted that she would hold back her identity at times. She stated that she did not feel that it had impacted her too much because:

> I'm not that involved with the community. It's definitely when friendships and those kind[s] of stuff come in. It impacts because you have to kind of limit…I have to kind of limit my interactions to people or kind of hold back from what I tell them.

Charuka, Mahin, and Baheela all recognized that it was more than just one aspect of their identity that impacted their experiences on campus and that they needed to modify their behaviors. Although their identities were fluid and allowed them to shift from one social construct of identity to the next during difficult experiences (Jones & Abes, 2013), the intersectionality of their identities also allowed differing forms of discrimination and oppression to occur (Harley et al., 2002; Jones & Abes, 2013).

Ways of Coping

When identity modification was ineffective, some participants shared that they developed ways of coping to assist them when they felt unsafe, unaccepted, and/or discriminated against. Paulo shared that he "became closer to some professors. Professors that [he] identified as allies." These professors aided in creating a safer environment for him on campus and provided him with desired mentorship through his academic journey.

Baheela opted to take some of her classes online to avoid having to present in front her peers in class. She noted,

> I'm taking my history and government and speech classes online because I feel if I go and I have to do a speech in history, this is not my history and I, someone is bound to stand up and say "Well you're one to talk". You can't say that. So, I feel I have to constantly appease somebody and say something or else someone will say something negative to me. So, there's always, I have a very big fear of being like people criticizing me openly. So, it impacts me in that way.

Mahin noted that she invested her time in her work as an artist to overcome and survive negative experiences. She shared,

> I would say my whole life it wasn't, it was, it had a positive impact because I was always disappointed from dating, or going to parties, or whatever, so, I spent more time painting and being in my studio and reading. So, I think being an artist kind of helped me to survive.

She also shared, "I feel like I can't overcome. So, I wonder if I can." Therefore, "Being successful in my work is something that makes me optimistic. I also think that medicine helps… and, like, asking support from communities of my friends. I think that helps". In contrast, Estuardo looked to online apps such as Grindr and going out. He noted,

> I feel like getting drunk and going to bars with friends. I think that was more helpful to talk it out than to talk in counseling because the counselors don't really know the day-to-day or what's been going on throughout your life.

Some participants also shared there were times when they just needed to work on self-preservation. During these times, they would seek opportunities to be with friends, spend time online, and/or focus on their schoolwork. Examining these differing ways of coping through CDA reveals that social action and/or advocacy is needed on campus to meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ international students (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak, 2001). It is evident that LGBTQIA+ students need educational programming that recognizes and supports their differing constructs of identity and experiences, as well as develops a sense of belonging (Yao, 2015). Likewise, within the IMMDI, when safe environments are absent due to macro structures of power and oppression that conflict with individual LGBTQIA+ students' identities (Jones & Abes, 2013), they will seek alternative options that may not always nurture their socioemotional well-being.

Limitations

While the findings of this study are significant, there are some limitations to be taken into consideration. Our participants were limited to eight international students who identified as pansexual, bisexual, gay and/or asexual; therefore, not all members of the LGBTQIA+ community were represented. In addition, limited knowledge of participants' socioemotional well-being, available resources, and utilized resources prior to coming to the United States was provided; therefore, limited comparative knowledge is available. In addition, our students were limited to national origins within South Asia, Southeastern Asia, Southwestern Asia, and Latin America.

DISCUSSION

In a review of our findings, macrolevels of power (Jones & Abes, 2013) within participants' environments can clearly be identified. These are present through normed collective majority sexually oriented, religious, and national identities. Specifically, identified within this study as heterosexual, Christian, American normed collective majority identities. Research has noted that collective identity is more than just a membership but also cognitive beliefs that define and transform group relationships and interactions within social environments (Ashmore et al., 2004; Bodine Al-Sharif, 2016; van Stekelenburg, 2013). Participants' voices clearly wove an intertextual dialog of oppression caused by normed collective majority power structures. At the microlevel (Jones & Abes, 2013), participants' individual and intersectional identities collided with the macrolevel normed collective majority power structures causing some to at times and when possible, hide the truths about their own identities in their differing environments to pass and in some instances survive. This revealed an interesting paradox that in a very short time (during their study in the United States), participants were or became well informed about the identities and normed collective majority power structures within their environments. However, participant identities were oftentimes challenged and rejected by the collective majority power structures with limited desire to know more or provide acceptance. Participants had to recognize their safety by navigating hostile environments based on the collective majority power structures present to negotiate what aspect(s) of their individual identity to present in social spaces. While there is fluidity in participants' intersectional constructs of identity, for some, having to live in a constant performative state – pushing one or more aspects of identity forward over another – took a toll on their socioemotional well-being. Their central knowledge of self was challenged by a lack of acceptance. These hostilities and challenges to their intersecting identities impacted their sense of belonging, which Yao (2015) suggests is important to have to have positive student outcomes.

Implications for Practice and Future Inquiry

The findings of this study reveal that more research is needed to understand how international LGBTQIA+ students develop and maintain a sense of belonging during their study abroad experiences. It is vital that programming be created that provides opportunities for continued dialog on the complexities and value of identity differences. In addition, online options for counseling and connecting with other LGBTQIA+ international students are needed to provide safer spaces to initially meet. This is especially true if their identity puts them in danger both in their native country and country of study. Further research is needed on the fluidity of power structures, as majority norms from home countries can be transferred by individuals into new environments, creating oppressive structures. Further study is also needed on the intersections of differing religions as macro (structural) systems of power in relation to LGBTQIA+ international student identity to provide insight into how to create inclusivity when differing non/religious belief systems intersect. Institutions can support the spiritual and religious needs of LGBTQIA+ international students through nondenominational and welcoming spaces that allow for the holistic development of their identity. Finally, gendered experiences based on national and

regional origins need to be explored to paint a better picture of how these social constructs promote or hinder sense of belonging. Similar to the recommendations of Metro-Roland (2018), students will benefit and see an increase in identity development when institutions foster an environment that encourages and allows students to explore the multiple identities they hold.

Conclusion

This study is significant because it captures the unique voices of LGBTQIA+ international students studying within the United States and provides insights into what resources they need to maintain socioemotional well-being. Ultimately, LGBTQIA+ international students' socioemotional well-being is dependent upon the relationships that they build on and off campus with their peers, faculty, and staff. They need to feel that the individuals with whom they interact within the study abroad environment can be trusted, support their identity development, and their educational journeys. The results of this study provide insights into the ways in which institutions of higher education can better support socioemotional well-being.

REFERENCES

Ashmore, R. D., Deaux, K. & McLaughlin-Volpe., T. (2004). An organizing framework for collective identity: Articulation and significance of multidimensionality. *Psychological Bulletin, 130*(1), 80-114.

Barker, M. J. (2015). Depression and/or oppression? Bisexuality and mental health. *Journal of Bisexuality*, *15*(3), 369-384. https://doi.org/10.1080/15299716.2014.995853

Barthes, R. (1974). S/Z: An essay (R. Miller, Trans.). Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1970)

Berger, C., Milicic, N., & Torretti, A. (2010). Socio-emotional well-being and academic achievement: Evidence from a multilevel approach. *Psicologia Reflexão e Crítica*, *24*(2), 344-351. https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-79722011000200016

Bodine Al-Sharif, M. A. (2016). *National Identity in Higher Education: The Guardianship of a Kingdom*. [Unpublished dissertation]. University of Oklahoma.

Bodine Al-Sharif, M. A. & Hassan Zadeh, S. (2020). A tale of two Sisters: A duoethnographical study of religious conversion. In J. T. Snipes & S. Manson (Eds.) *Remixed and reimagined: Innovations in religion, spirituality, and (Inter)faith in higher education.* (pp. 105-121). Myers Educational Press.

Brackett, M. A., & Rivers, S. E. (2014). Transforming students' lives with social and emotional learning. In R. Pekrun & L. Linnenbrink-Garcia (Eds). *International handbook of emotions in education* (pp. 368-388). Routledge.

Butler, J. (2006). Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity. Routledge Classics.

Castiello-Jones, K., Misra, J., & McCurley, K. (2013). Intersectionality in Sociology [Fact Sheet]. https://socwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/swsfactsheet_intersectionality.pdf

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, *1989*(1), 139-167. http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality. Identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241-1299. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1229039

Crockett, S., & Hayes, D. (2011). Understanding and responding to the career counseling needs of international college students on U.S. campuses. *Journal of College Counseling*, *14*(1), 65-79.

Davies, M., Lewis, N. M., & Moon, G. (2018). Sexuality, space, gender, and health: Renewing geographical approaches to well-being in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer populations. *Geography Compass*, *12*, 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12369

Fagan, R. W. (1994). Social well-being in university students. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *23*, 237-249. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01537447

Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. Addison Wesley Longman Limited.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Policy Press.

Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical discourse analysis. In T.A. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction* (258-284). Sage.

Goodwill, J. R., & Zhou, S. (2020). Association between perceived public stigma and suicidal behaviors among college students of color in the U.S. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, *262*, 1-7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.10.019

Gorrochategui, J. R. (2019, August 29). Guide foreign students on the path to mental health. *Times Higher Education*, 18.

Harley, D. A., Nowak, T. M., Gassaway, L. J., & Savage, T. A. (2002). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender college student with disabilities: A look at multiple cultural minorities. *Psychology in the Schools*, *39*(5), 525-539.

Herridge, A. S., García, H. A., Leong, M. (2019). Intersectionality of lesbian, gay, and bisexual international students: Impact of perceived experiences on campus engagement. *Journal for the Study of Postsecondary and Tertiary Education*, *4*, 49-65. https://doi.org/10.28945/4412

Human Rights Campaign [HRC]. (2015). LGBT: Moving towards equality. *Global Leadership & Governance*, 64-67.

Iacono, G. (2019). An affirmative mindfulness approach for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth mental health. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *47*, 156-166. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10615-018-0656-7

Institute of International Education. (2021). "U.S colleges and universities remain top choice for international students." https://www.iie.org/en/Why-IIE/Announcements/2021/11/US-Institutions-Top-Choice-for-Intl-Students

Jones, S. R., & Abes, E. S. (2013). *Identity development of college students: Advancing frameworks for multiple dimensions of identity*. Jossey-Bass.

Kim, N., Oh, S., & Mumbauer, J. (2019). Supporting international students: Enhancing college counselors' multicultural counseling competence. *Journal of College Counseling*, *22*, 179-192. https://doi.org/10.1002/jocc.12129

Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*. Columbia University Press.

Lee, J. J. (2010). International students' experiences and attitudes at a US host institution: Self-reports and future recommendations. *Journal of Research in International Education*, *9*(1). doi:10.1177/1475240909356382

Leong, P. P. (2015) Coming to America: Assessing the patterns of acculturation, friendship formation, and the academic experiences of international students at a U.S. college. *Journal of International Students*, *5*(4), 459-474.

Lértora, I, M., Herridge, A. S., Smith, N. L., & Croffie, A. L. (2021) Lesbian, gay, and bisexual international students transitions conceptualized using relational-cultural theory: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*. https://doi.org/10.1080/15401383.2021.1924095

Li, P., Wong, Y. J., & Toth, P. (2013). Asian international students' willingness to seek counseling: A mixed-methods study. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counseling*, *55*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-012-9163-7

McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs, 30*, 1771–1800.

Mehešová, M. (2017). Social-emotional health of university students and the importance of its research. *Acta Educationis Generalis*, *7*(2), 79-85. https://doi.org/10.1515/atd-2017-0015

Metro-Roland, M. (2018). Community, identity, and international student engagement. *Journal of International Students*, *8*(3), 1408-1421. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1254603

Mitchell, S. L., Greenwood, A. K., & Guglielmi, M. C. (2007). Utilization of counseling services: Comparing international and U.S. college students. *Journal of College Counseling*, *10*(2), 117-129.

Muller, S. M., Dennis, D. L., & Gorrow, T. (2006). Emotional well-being of college students in health courses with and without an exercise component. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, *103*, 717-725. https://doi.org/10.2466/PMS.103.3.717-725

Muñoz, S. M., Vigil, D., Jach, E., & Rodriguez-Gutierrez, M. (2018). Unpacking resilience and trauma: Examining the "Trump effect" in higher education for undocumented Latinx college students. *Association of Mexican American Educators*, *12*(3), 33-52. https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.12.3.405

National LGBT Health Education Center. (2018). Suicide risk and prevention for LGBTQ people. https://www.lgbtqiahealtheducation.org/publication/suicide-risk-and-prevention-for-lgbtq-patients/

Oba, Y., & Pope, M. (2013). Counseling and advocacy with LGBT international students. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, *7*(2), 185-193.

Pew Research Center. (2019). In. U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An update on America's changing religious landscape. *Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life*. https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/.

Pew Research Center. (2020). Religious Landscape Study. *Pew Research Center: Religion & Public Life*. https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/.

Pham, N. C., & Shi, J. R. (2020). A qualitative study on mental distress of Vietnamese students in the U.S.A. in the Covid 19 era. *Asia Pacific Journal of Health Management, 15*(3), 45–57.

Pritchard, M. E., & Wilson, G. S. (2003). Using emotional and social factors to predict student success. *Journal of College Student Development*, *44*(1), 18-28. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2003.0008

Rasmussen, D. M. (ed.) (1996). *The handbook of critical theory*. Blackwell.

Reinert, P. M. (2019). Social-emotional learning: A model for higher education. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, *12*(2), 114-115. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIT-02-2019-0039

Rogers, R. (2011). Critical approaches to discourse analysis in educational research. In R. Roger's (ed.), *An Introduction to Critical Discourse Analysis in Education* (2nd ed.). (pp. 1-20). Routledge.

Simmons, H. (2014). Dying for love: Homosexuality in the Middle East. *Human Rights and Human Welfare* (Issue of Homan Rights in the Middle East and North Africa), 160-172.

Stocker, S. L., & Gallagher, K. M. (2019). Alleviating anxiety and altering appraisals: Social-emotional learning in the college classroom. *College Teaching*, *67*(1), 23-35. https://doi.org/10.1080/87567555.2018.1515722

Strayhorn, T. L. (2012). *College students' sense of belonging: A key to educational success for all students*. Routledge.

Suh, H., Rice, K. G., Choi, C., Nuenen, M., & Zhang, Y. (2016). Measuring acculturative stress with the SAFE: Evidence for longitudinal measurement invariance and associations with life satisfaction. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *89*, 217-222. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.10.002

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Tocqueville, A. (2010*). Democracy in America: Historical-Critical Edition of De la démocratie en Amérique*, ed. Eduardo Nolla, translated from the French by James T. Schleifer. A Bilingual French-English editions, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010). Vol. 2. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/2286.

van Dijk, T. A. (2003). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen & H. E. Hamilton's (eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis*. (pp. 352-371). Blackwell Publishing, Ltd.

van Stekelenburg, J. (2013). Collective identity. In D. A. Snow, D. della Porta, B. Klandermans & McAdam's (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*. (pp.1-7). Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Walby, S., Armstrong, J., & Strid, S. (2012). Intersectionality: Multiple inequalities in social theory. Sociology, 46, 224–240.

Wodak, R. (2001). What CDA is about – a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. (pp. 1-14). Sage.

Yao, C. W. (2015). Sense of belonging in international students: Making the case against integration to US institutions of higher education. *Comparative & International Higher Education, 7*, 6–10.

Zimmerman, A. S., & Herridge, A. S. (2018). Campus climate and the theory of gender performativity: Implications for research and policy. In R. Jeffries (Eds.),

Diversity, equity, and inclusivity in contemporary higher education (pp. 226-242). IGI Global.

Zimmerman, A. S., & Herridge, A. S. (2022). Campus climate and the theory of gender performativity: Implications for research and policy In I. Management Association (Eds.). *Research anthology on feminist studies and gender perceptions* (pp. 318-334). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-6684-4511-2 (Reprinted from *Diversity, equity, and inclusivity in contemporary higher education*, (pp. 226-242), by R. Jeffries (Eds.), 2018, IGI Global.

Author bios

Andrew S. Herridge, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at The University of Southern Mississippi. He obtained his B.A. in psychology and English from Florida State University, his M.Ed. in College Student Affairs Administration from the University of West Florida, and his Ph.D. in Higher Education research from Texas Tech University. His research interests include access and equity in higher education, LGBTQIA students and resources, institutional leadership and policy, and international and comparative higher education. Email: Andrew.Herridge@usm.edu

Mary Ann Bodine Al-Sharif, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor of Higher Education in the School of Education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. She completed her B.A. in Religious Studies at Randall University, M.A. in English at the University of Central Oklahoma, and M.Ed. and Ph.D. in Adult and Higher Education at the University of Oklahoma. Dr. Bodine Al-Sharif has worked in higher education for over 14 years as both a faculty member and student affairs and services administrator. She served as a Social Justice Graduate Research Fellow during her doctoral studies, and in 2019, she was selected by the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia through the International Exhibition and Conference on Higher Education (IECHE) Program as a Saudi Fellow. Her research interests are focused on current global movements in educational reform, international higher education, student development, and issues of social justice and advocacy within higher education. Specifically, she explores the lives of students who define themselves as living between worlds across issues of ability, race, religion, gender expression and the like. Email: drbas@uab.edu

Mi Chelle Leong, MEd, is a Ph.D. student at Louisiana Tech University in the I/O Psychology program. She earned her B.S. in Psychology from Upper Iowa University and an M. Ed in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Texas Tech University. Michelle is a Licensed Professional Counselor Associate in Texas and a registered counselor in Malaysia. Her current research interests are in corporate sustainability, videoconferencing technology in recruitment and selection, remote work, and DEI initiatives. Email: mcl041@latech.edu

Hugo A. García, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor at Texas Tech University. He obtained his B.A. in international relations from UC-San Diego, M.Ed. in higher education administration and student affairs from the University of Southern California and a Ph.D. in Education with an emphasis on higher education from Claremont Graduate University.

His research interests pertain to access and equity in higher education, retention of underrepresented students at two- and four-year postsecondary institutions, international higher education, diversity in higher education, and the P-20 education pipeline. Specifically, his work focuses on conducting research on community colleges and their impact on underrepresented students' academic success, student transition to community colleges and four-year institutions, institutional responses to globalization and the internationalization of higher education, and educational outcomes for students of color throughout the educational pipeline. Email: Hugo.Garcia@ttu.edu