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2012-2013 Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative Report: "Experiences of LGBQ Undergraduates at UCLA"

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Executive Summary

The 2012-2013 Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative (URPI) study explored the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer (LGBQ) undergraduates at UCLA. A team of eleven undergraduate research team members conducted a series of focus groups with LGBQ students wherein overall experiences, strategies for navigating campus, and sources of support were discussed. Findings suggest that while most students thought of UCLA as a generally LGBQ friendly campus, a number of students also felt that safety was limited and that certain spaces were publicly accepting but actually homophobic. With regard to a sense of LGBQ community at UCLA, students felt there was a lack of cohesiveness and many sub-communities were mentioned. The LGBT Center was considered a great resource, but concerns were raised that it was very white male-dominated. Ultimately, the salience of students' LGBQ identity mediated the extent to which they perceived various spaces as inclusive. Participants provided recommendations for supporting LGBQ students including staff training and educational workshops for the broader UCLA community.

Background

The Undergraduate Research Partnership Initiative (URPI) is an ongoing research collaboration between Student Affairs Information and Research Office (SAIRO) researchers and current UCLA undergraduates. The purpose of URPI is to meaningfully engage UCLA students in the collection of institutional data and produce qualitative research on student experiences that will inform the work of Student Affairs practitioners and other campus stakeholders. Undergraduate participants gain valuable first-hand experience in designing a research study as well as collecting and analyzing qualitative data.

Ultimately, SAIRO's collaboration with undergraduate researchers is an attempt to foster a mutually beneficial relationship in which students' voices are heard and incorporated into the working body of information used in Student Affairs and the broader UCLA community. The 2012-2013 URPI team consisted of 9 undergraduate researchers and two peer facilitators (undergraduates with previous URPI experience who both participated in the research and mentored other researchers). The undergraduate researchers represented a range of student demographics, varying by major, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation (see Table 1, for research team demographics).

The 2012-2013 URPI study investigated the experiences and navigational strategies of LGBQ students at UCLA[1]. Many LGBQ students are "invisible" to higher education institutions because there is a limited amount of research done to capture their concerns and needs (Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; Sanlo, 2004). Furthermore, LGBQ undergraduate students face challenges unique to their sexual orientation that can prevent them from achieving their academic potential (Rankin, 2005). According to previous research, they face harassment, fear for their physical safety, and sometimes find their environments to be homophobic (Rankin, 2005). This study sought to contribute on the understanding of LGBQ student experiences by exploring 1) how an LGBQ identity shaped overall experiences at UCLA, 2) how LGBQ students navigated the campus, and 3) where LGBQ students found support on campus. The undergraduate research team also asked for recommendations from interviewees on how to improve experiences and access to support for LGBQ students.

Methods

A qualitative study design was used to answer key research questions. Five focus groups were assembled, each comprised of 2-11 participants, yielding a total of 27 participants. Each focus group interview was conducted by two undergraduate researchers in a semi-structured format. Questions were developed by the research team as a scripted protocol with the flexibility to re-phrase and ask relevant follow-up questions in a conversational format. The fact that researchers themselves were undergraduates allowed study participants to share their opinions about the campus environment in ways that they may not have expressed to a campus administrator or SAIRO.

Throughout the course of the academic year, undergraduate research team members prepared to collect data with the guidance of SAIRO staff through a combination of weekly meetings and assignments designed to enhance understanding and ability to conduct qualitative research. Focus groups were conducted on campus during Week 3 of Winter Quarter. Following the focus group interviews, undergraduate researchers transcribed the audio recordings verbatim. In addition to facilitation and transcription responsibilities, undergraduate researchers wrote analytic memos which laid the foundation for subsequent analysis of the transcripts

Table 1. Undergraduate Research Team Demographics

Sexual Identity	Asexual (2), Bisexual (3), Gay (3), Homosexual (1), Straight (2)
Gender Identity	Female (7), Male (4)
Race/Ethnicity	Asian American/Vietnamese (1), Black/African American (1), Chinese (2), Filipino (1), Hispanic (1), Latino (1), Mexican-American (1), Mixed Race (1), White/Caucasian (1), White/Pakistani (1)
Year in School	2nd (3), 3rd (3), 4th (3), 5th (2)
Major*	Afro-American Studies (1), Anthropology (1), Asian American Studies (1), English (1), Environmental Science (1), Geography (1), History (1), Physiological Science (1), Pre-Human Biology and Society (2), Sociology (6)

*There are numerically more majors than research team members because some members were double majoring.

[1]We made the decision to not include transgender or transsexual students in our study because the unique experiences of this population

as a team. Collectively, the team developed a coding schema that captured trends and/or themes across focus groups that was used to code all transcripts. Transcripts were coded more than once to ensure inter-rater reliability among team members.

Researchers made a concerted effort to interview a diverse set of students, both in terms of social identities and undergraduate experiences. All demographic information was self-reported. Names of participants were removed, as was any other potentially identifying information, to protect participants' privacy. Table 2 displays participant demographics.

Findings

Four major themes emerged from our analysis, including: 1) Perceptions of Campus Climate, 2) LGBQ Community at UCLA, 3) Spaces and Experiences, and 4) Recommendations. Underlying each of these areas was the importance of the participant's own LGBQ identity development. Bilodeau and Renn's (2005) discussion of the D'Augelli framework of human development as "unfolding in concurring and multiple paths" emphasizes the difference between developing a personal LGBQ identity, developing an LGBQ social identity, and actually entering an LGBQ community (p. 29). Although all the participants self-identified as LGBQ, whether they had developed an LGBQ social identity or the extent to which they felt comfortable being seen as LGBQ varied among participants. Differential levels of comfort with the LGBQ social identity and community largely shaped the ways in which students perceived the climate and LGBQ community at UCLA, as well as where they found support.

I. Perceptions of Campus Climate

Perceptions of campus climate were mixed, but the majority of participants felt that UCLA was neither completely homophobic nor entirely accepting. A number of participants experienced UCLA as a diverse campus, providing adequate resources to LGBQ students. Other students described feeling that UCLA tolerates diverse student populations but does not adequately address the needs of LGBQ students. All participants voiced a concern for improving the experiences of LGBQ students at UCLA. This section describes views of UCLA as accepting and tolerant as well as perceptions of campus safety

a. Campus as Accepting

Students who described UCLA as accepting of LGBQ individuals said that LGBQ student organizations and the LGBT Center were symbols of a welcoming environment for diverse student populations. One participant went so far as to say, "… I feel like we've almost reached a point where people are actually ostracized or looked down upon if they're not extremely accepting and supportive of queer people" (T2, P3, 40-42). Using the home environment as a reference point, many students voiced appreciation for how accepting campus was compared to some home communities (both local and international), cultures, and religions. One Native American student spoke of his conservative family background and culture, concluding that, "… it's hella more accepting here than it was back on the [reservation]" (T5, P4, 33-34).

Table 2. Interviewee Demographics

Sexual Identity	Asexual (1) , Bisexual (5), Bisexual Fluid(1),Gay (7), Gay two-spirit (1), Homosexual (2), Lesbian (5), Pansexual(1), Queer (3), Queer Lesbian (1)
Gender Identity	Female (14), Male (13)
Race/Ethnicity	Asian American(6), Latino(7), Caucasian(5), American Indian(1), Indian-Middle-Eastern(3), Mixed race/ ethnicity (5).
Year in School	1st (3), 2nd (6), 3rd (9), 4th (4), 5th (5)
Major	North Campus Disciplines: 17 South Campus Disciplines: 10

RESEARCH TEAM	Peer Facilitators	Undergraduate Researchers		
Project Facilitators	Anees Hasnain	Sam Wang	Kaila Shivers	Liliana Ramos
Elvira Rodriguez	Ashley Truong	Olivia Hansell	Hugo Rios	
Kristen McKinney		Joseph Juarez	Faye Jin	
		Kyle Granoli		

Participants saw the LGBT Center, especially, as a symbol of acceptance, openness to diversity, and as a support to LGBQ individuals. For example, one participant said: "the gay and lesbian center has the flag that hangs out right in front of it…I see the school as a forward thinking in that respect," (T2, P3, 11-14). To many of the participants, the LGBT Center was also a signifier of the presence of an LGBQ community on campus, regardless of whether or not they felt that they belonged to this community, a point that will be described greater detail later in this report. Ultimately, students were impressed by the sheer amount of resources available to LGBQ students and as one student said, "...you have all your clubs and all these organizations...you have the LGBT resource center. You just have endless, just everything..." (T3, P3, 37-38 & 40-41). The extent to which students accessed the resources available, depended a great deal on where they were at developmentally as an LGBQ person, as will be discussed in section 2c: Accessing Institutional Support.

b. Campus as Tolerant

Moderating the belief that UCLA is welcoming for LGBQ individuals, many students felt that campus was not completely accepting. Their feedback framed the climate as merely tolerant. Some participants spoke about their discomfort when walking around campus and showing displays of affection with their partner that were met with looks of disapproval. Their discomfort extended into the classroom, where participants said they "cannot approach [their professors]" because of a lack of faculty sensitivity to LGBQ issues (T4, P12, 20-21).

Participants also voiced feeling a lack of solidarity with non-LGBQ peers. They expressed difficulty in finding a safe space that included straight people and felt that their peers would not openly condemn discrimination. Furthermore, participants noted the disdain peers have for LGBQ individuals who are outwardly gay. One participant expressed this sentiment he observed among peers: "You can be gay but I don't really want you to be too political about it, or I don't want to hear about it anyways" (T2, P9, 33-34). Thus, while some students felt that UCLA was accepting of LGBQ individuals, most felt that UCLA was tolerant instead of welcoming or fully accepting.

c. Campus Safety

Safety was a concern for LGBQ students who participated in this study. Students said they felt safe only during the day and only on campus. For example, some students described being fearful of walking alone at night or in the areas surrounding UCLA. Moreover, participants were afraid of appearing outwardly gay, noting an incident that happened a short time before the focus groups were conducted. One student reflected on the attack that occurred off-campus and took it as a reminder to take caution when walking alone at night:

> "I have the privilege of not looking outwardly gay…I've had a friend who was just assaulted, and he told us he was wearing eyeliner, and gave a dead ringer to the attacker. And so I don't wear anything outwardly—I don't want to use any choice phrases but—attire that calls attention, calls attention at all. So you know, no one is going to hurt me, whatever. I mean I know it's a possibility. I'm always self-aware and I always look around, walk fast at night. And I don't have much fear. You know, it's a personal thing, you know everybody has their own personal experiences," (T4, P24, 25-33).

Although the event did not occur on the UCLA campus, participants shared that acts of homophobia that occur in the surrounding neighborhood affect their perception of campus safety at UCLA.

II. The LGBQ Community

In describing their overall experiences at UCLA, participants shared their views about the presence, or lack thereof, of an LGBQ community. As students described their experiences, it became clear that participants were in different places with regard to the devel-

opment of their own LBGQ identities. Some students felt comfortable being out in multiple contexts while others were out to a select group of people. Many students described experiences as activists within the LGBQ community while others struggled to access support that would not make their identity known to others. In this section we first describe the coming out process as it relates to establishing a connection with LGBQ peers on campus. Secondly, strategies individuals used to navigate campus are discussed. Lastly, findings related to institutional support are described.

a. Coming Out

Coming out is a developmental process with LGBQ persons moving toward a more integrated and positive sense of self and connectedness to their identity (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). In this study, the process of coming out was important because it fundamentally shaped participants' access to support, role in the LGBQ community, and overall experiences at UCLA. While it may be problematic to view coming out as the ultimate goal for every LGBQ individual, participants linked many benefits to coming out, including finding community and support (T3, P16, 37-39) as well as a feeling of relief (T3, P16, 8-9).

A recurring theme in the data was that the process of coming out was deeply personal and very complex for participants who shared their experiences. There were many factors that contributed to participants' decision to come out. For example, participants described the need to consider whether it was safe to come out. This was especially true for participants who came from backgrounds that were extremely homophobic. One participant explained, "You really don't want to come out to your parents… Last thing you want is them throwing you out of the family before you're financially independent" (T3, P16, 17-19). For individuals who did come from homophobic families or communities, UCLA was a welcomed relief, which some described as "liberating" (T3, P4, 30).

Even among those who did not fear rejection from their families or communities, participants expressed the need to be cautious when coming out to certain individuals or in particular circumstances. One participant said, "I've never not done research with someone [before coming out to them]. I always try to figure out who they are. Are they accepting? Do they have any queer friends?" (T1, P12, 26-31). Other participants shared similar experiences of doing "research" before deciding to come out to other students or staff members. They described this research as a cost-benefit analysis, stating: "If the costs of coming out to someone outweigh the benefits of coming out to someone, I'm not gonna come out to them" (T3, P12, 15-16). Other factors that dissuaded LGBQ individuals from coming out included fear of experiencing change (e.g. friendships changing) (T5, P11, 6-8) or negative reactions to previous instances of coming out. For example, some bisexual participants described being challenged by questions like "how do you know you are bisexual?" when coming out to friends (T5, P11, 16-25).

Ultimately, participants described coming out as an ongoing process in which one shares their LGBQ identity with multiple people, in multiple contexts, over a lifetime. That students were engaged in this ongoing process complicated their time at UCLA. As one participant put it, "I often find that I'm kind of constantly coming out and often times, I'm still in that uncomfortable situation even when I'm still really out" (T5, P3, 12-14). While some were uncomfortable being out to anyone other than close friends, others felt more comfortable sharing their LGBQ identity with others. The level of comfortability participants had with their identity shaped how they navigated campus and found support.

b. Individual Navigational Strategies

Participants described a number of navigational strategies they used to negotiate the campus, some conscious and others that were less deliberate. For one, participants described playing down or playing up their LGBQ identity as a navigational strategy. In some circumstances participants felt it was easier to "pass" or allow others to assume that they were straight. One participant said, "I don't wear anything… that calls attention at all" (T4, P24, 27-29), noting the importance of dress in passing as straight. Another participant described feeling that, "sometimes it is just easier to not have to make [my LGBQ identity] salient" (T3, P19, 1). Students who were able to pass as straight said they did so because they feared for their safety or felt that it was just easier to go along with people who believed them to be heterosexual.

On the other hand, some participants deliberately sought to express their LGBQ identity. For example, one participant noted that her Facebook profile online is "covered in rainbows" and that "if someone adds me on Facebook, they'll know that I'm queer" (T1, P13, 37-41). Participants who took measures to ensure

that others would be aware of their LGBQ identity said they wanted to avoid questions about their identity and felt that "advertising" themselves as gay was a natural part of the coming out process (T3, P17, 41-43, P18, 1-3).

One way that students openly expressed their LGBQ identity was through leadership roles and activities on campus. Students expressed their leadership through offering a queer perspective in classroom discussions (T1, P18, 19-21) or through facilitating discussions and group activities with other LGBQ students (T5, P17, 40-46). Students who felt comfortable expressing their LGBQ identity found themselves increasingly involved in leadership roles inside and outside of class. Students described feeling empowered by the leadership roles they had taken on, which ultimately provided them a sense of belonging and purpose at UCLA. For example, one student said of an internship: "It not only gives me pride in my lesbian identity, but it also keeps me on track with my studies" (T1, P20, 30-31). Similarly, another student said that asserting her LGBQ identity has helped her grow more and be more confident in her identity (T1, P18, 42-43, P19, 1).

The final strategy we observed was the most intuitive – that LGBQ students gravitated toward spaces they deemed supportive and people that made them feel comfortable and welcome, and withdrew from spaces where they felt that their LGBQ identity was not welcome. As one participant said, "a lot of students… are putting themselves in areas, spaces where they're not really accepting… where being gay, being lesbian, being queer, all that stuff isn't quite the norm. But putting myself in spaces where being queer is awesome… I don't really feel the backlash. I feel I just didn't put myself in those [unaccepting] places" (T2, P4, 40-43; P5, 1-2). Ultimately, individual strategies used by participants to successfully navigate campus were largely mediated by how comfortable individuals were expressing their LGBQ identity. It is promising that those who embraced and proudly claimed their LGBQ identity were able to parlay their sexual minority status into leadership roles, undergraduate research activities, and opportunities for self-exploration.

c. Accessing Institutionalized Support

In discussing where they found support, participants described how intersecting social identities, student organizations, and the visibility of support all played a major role. While the aforementioned individual navigational strategies shed light on how participants made decisions in daily life on campus, this section describes how students accessed more formal support and the extent to which their LGBQ identity mediated that as well. What became clear from discussions of institutional support is that services are overwhelmingly geared toward those individuals who are most comfortable with their LGBQ identity. Participants described a need for support services for LGBQ students at all stages of identity development.

Many students discussed other social identities that intersected with their sexual identity. Intersecting identities, like sexual, gender, racial/ethnic identity, all seemed to shape where students felt comfortable finding support at UCLA. In some cases, intersecting identities helped participants find support, while other times, it was perceived as a barrier to finding support. For example, student organizations centered around a racial/ethnic identity were at times welcoming to students of color who were also queer. Other times, student groups were inclusive of racial/ethnic minority students but were discriminatory toward LGBQ students of color. Ultimately, a student group was most supportive when it centralized a particular identity while embracing the heterogeneity of its members. Again, students' awareness of their LGBQ identity mediated their level of comfort in seeking out institutional support.

Although many students acknowledged that UCLA does provide support to LGBQ students, many described a lack of awareness of how to access institutional support. In other words, they felt that support existed, but described feeling out of the loop when it came to knowing what events were going on, etc. For example, one student said, "I kind of wish I could know more about LGBTQ events, because I kind of feel in the shadows about that. I don't really know what's going on…. I kind of wish that would be more publicized…" (T5, P16, 22-25). This is one of many examples in which students expressed a lack of awareness about the services available to them as LGBQ students. Students also described a lack of information about events, services, or programs geared toward students who are not comfortable "outing" themselves. For example, the LGBT Center was described as a highly visible form of support, which was great in that

everyone knew it was there, but its visibility on campus also served to deter those who were not comfortable being seen by others as LGBQ identified.

d. The LGBT Center

The LGBT Center was often identified as a primary source of community or support. As mentioned earlier, it symbolized UCLA's acceptance and appreciation of diverse student populations. For many students, it represented a vital source of support, a home base for all LGBT students. However, some students said that the hypervisibility of the LGBT Center was off-putting. Many did not feel comfortable entering a space that everyone can see is for LGBQ students. One student said, "I literally before this year I didn't even enter the [LGBT] center because I was so scared because the rainbow flag is flying everywhere in the wind and everyone can see it…" (T2, P8, 2-4). This student's comment highlights the need for institutional supports for students at all stages of LGBQ identity development.

The LGBT Center was not always perceived as supportive. Many participants shared experiences of feeling uncomfortable at the Center, that it was not a space for students of color and that it was male dominated. One participant said, "I'm a queer woman of color. And everyone wasn't. Like you said it was male -dominated, I also feel like the center isn't a space for people of color at least what I've experienced (T1, P3, 20-22)." Here, the student's queer, racial, and gender identities shaped her feeling excluded from the Center. She voiced concern over a lack of support for students of color who identify as female and queer.

The Center was also perceived as having an exclusive community, comprised of a small group of friends. This perception of the center as "clique-y" also deterred students from coming to the Center (T5, P9, 7-13 & 41). One student commented on the Center's exclusivity saying, "I don't go to the Center a lot… 'Cause like it is a really small community, so it's hard to make friends if you don't already know people" (T1, P2, 28-29). Many students acknowledged that the LGBT Center was a space for community and support, but ultimately felt that access to this resource was limited.

e. LGBQ Community At UCLA

Although the LGBT Center symbolized community for some, participants reported that there is not a cohesive LGBQ community at UCLA but a fragmented one. Students said there were "pockets" or small communities, most of which were student groups (T4, P5, 29-30 & 33-34). Some were organized around LGBQ issues while others focused on other social identities. Although participants did not feel like they had a united LGBQ community on campus, they did express a sense of community within these sub-communities. Other factors that mediated how students involved themselves in the LGBQ "community" were their level of "outness" and their personality. As was previously discussed, coming out is a complex process, so students who had only recently come out had difficulties accessing this sense of community. Some students blamed their shyness as an obstacle to being a part of an LGBQ "pocket" and felt at fault for not being able to access resources.

Big events on campus, like the counter-picket for the Westboro Baptist Church, movie showings, or Ally Week, helped facilitate a stronger sense of unity between the disconnected "pockets" of community (T1, P5, 26-39). However, students qualified their responses by saying that although the sense of community improved, it still felt lacking and incomplete. The next section discusses in greater detail some of the specific spaces in which students felt excluded or supported at UCLA

III. Spaces and Experiences

Participants' perceptions of various spaces on campus were largely dependent upon the salience of their LGBQ identity and their expectations for certain spaces recognizing that identity. In other words, where students were with respect to the development of a LGBQ identity shaped how they experienced various spaces on campus. Spaces are defined in this study as both the physical and conceptual areas on campus that the participants identified as being devoted to a specific activity.

a. Types of Spaces

Spaces described by participants were categorized as either forced primacy queer, liminal, or forced primacy heteronormative or homophobic based on how students talked about them. Forced primacy and liminal spaces referred to how salient one's identity is made by the space. Forced primacy spaces were further differentiated based on how this salience was framed. Forced primacy queer refered to spaces where one's LGB identity was made salient in a positive way, such as the LGBT Center in which the LGBQ identity is made primary in a positive way. Forced pri

macy heteronormative or homophobic categories capture spaces where one's LGB identity was made salient in a negative manner. The distinction between heternormative and homophobic spaces was meant to capture distinctions between microaggressions and more overtly violent interactions. Liminal spaces were ones where participants felt their LGB identities were not made salient. Similar to the positive and negative distinction made within forced primacy spaces, liminal spaces could either be felt as a positive or a negative depending on the participant's personal development of their LGBQ identity. Experiences were categorized into distinct spaces and then labeled as either positive or negative. This categorization of spaces provided the research team with a tool by which to better understand types of spaces on campus. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of the categories of spaces described by participants in the study.

b. Common Spaces

Participants specified three general spaces on campus: academia, housing, and extracurricular activities. Different patterns emerged as participants spoke about these spaces. Although some spaces inspired general consensus in their perceived heteronormativity or homophobia, other spaces were less clear given the different experiences of the participants

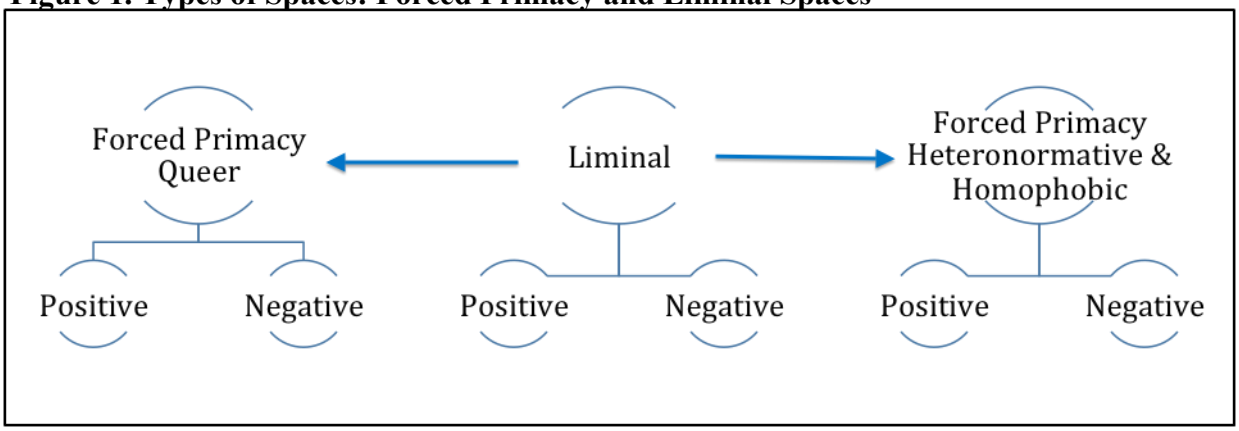
c. Academia

Academia encompassed all spaces that were related to academic activities. An important factor in how participants perceived their academic identity was whether they were "north campus" or "south campus"[2] majors. Those who mentioned majors that fit into the social sciences or humanities felt their identity was highly relevant to their academic pursuits, while those who mentioned majors that fall within the life and physical sciences felt that academia was a liminal space wherein their identity was not important. Participants explained that within south campus majors, one's social identity is less important than in north campus fields. One participant stated that the culture of south campus is centered around science and not individual background: "we're all south campus, we're in this together" (T3, P10, 7-12). In this case, this student perceived academics as a liminal space due to his positionality as a south campus major.

"North campus" students reported feeling that their identity as a LGBQ individual was relevant to their academic pursuits, specifically the kinds of classes they took and the research they conducted independently. One English major explained "[my LGB identity is] quite relevant for me because a lot of the research that I do is related to queerness in literature… fortunately I get to discuss it constantly with faculty and students" (T2, P22, 18-23). While south campus majors focused on how expressing one's LGB identity may distract from the overall unity of south campus, north campus majors focused how this identity contributed to their academic endeavors. For north campus majors, discussions of LGB identity were more readily incorporated into academia.

Although social science majors felt the LGBQ identity was important to their academic pursuits, many said that LGB issues were still marginalized in the classroom curriculum and in interactions with teaching assistants and professors. Students reflected on the lim-

Figure 1. Types of Spaces: Forced Primacy and Liminal Spaces



[2]At UCLA, "north campus" refers to majors that fall within the social sciences or the humanities, while "south campus" refers to majors that fall within life sciences of physical sciences

ited attention given to discussing LGBQ issues and the sometimes difficult time they had in bringing up LGBQ issues to resistant professors.

One participant said:

> "[It is unfortunate that LGBQ issues are ignored] especially in ethnic studies classes and gender studies classes, where we're supposed to be highlighting the multiplicity of identities, we only talk about like LGBT issues one day, and then it's like all, like everything that is under the rainbow is packed into one day" (T4, P14, 17-21).

Another student described the negative implications of silencing LGBQ issues, saying "it's just like the last thing you talk about, oh let's fit it in somewhere, you know? It doesn't feel good" and that "it kinds of does affect your ability to be engaged in the classroom." (T1, P8, 17-18). This student went on to describe experiencing an instance of homophobia when her professor would not let her addresse LGBQ issues in a paper "because he just didn't want to hear them" (T1, P10, 1-3).

Other students offered experiences with teaching assistants and professors that demonstrated a lack of understanding and sensitivity in discussing LGB issues in the classroom and explained how this made them feel uncomfortable in that space and discouraged them from further interaction with these authority figures. Because academia was at times a place for discussion of social identity, it was sometimes talked about as a forced primary space, while other times it was considered a space where identity was not important or a liminal space. The extent to which students advocated that their identity be made a topic of discussion, or wanted to talk about their identity, determined whether they found academic spaces silencing or supportive. A disconnect emerged when students in social science courses wanted to talk about their LGBQ identity, but found professors would only do so superficially or not at all.

d. Housing

Housing experiences while attending UCLA become a major theme in focus group discussions. Participants spoke about both on-campus housing and off-campus apartments. Although a few participants did recount positive experiences, the majority reported negative experiences ranging from laughing at homophobic remarks to exclusion from housing opportunities. Participants discussed both interactions with roommates and floormates and a larger discussion about the programming provided by the Office of Residential Life (ORL).

Students described the everyday challenges of living with a group of individuals who were not aware of their sexuality. One participant shared an instance when she felt uncomfortable due to homophobic jokes made by roommates:

> My first year I was in Hitch suites and like all my roommates were like straight and it was not like bad but like uncomfortable living with them because I didn't tell them I was queer. And yeah, there's always this like weird uncomfortable feeling when you're living with a bunch of straight people and they don't know. And they would like watch stuff on TV and make homophobic comments and it's like oh I'm like sitting in the living room with them like so...(T1, P16-17, 42-5)

Another participant described both a negative and positive experience with roommates, highlighting the uncertainty LGBQ individuals may face regarding whether or not they will be accepted by others:

> Actually one of my roommates was this devout Christian and the other one was just a more quirky girl. And surprisingly my Christian roommate was ok with me being queer. She was like 'Oh, that's fine I don't care it's your life'; she was like very supportive. She even went to a meeting with me once. But the other one she was just like very against it. But it turns out she was queer, she was just not ok with herself being queer so she took it out on me. I wish I would have seen that one coming but I didn't. And then my second roommate for this past year, my third year, she was um- she's very supportive, she's very LGBT friendly and I had a good experience with her. We're still very good friends. (T1, P17-18).

Multiple students also referenced instances of homophobia in and around the residence halls and apartments surrounding UCLA. For example, one student reported that during National Coming Out week, "we had a sign that we put up, and [someone wrote]: 'faggots aren't welcomed here,' on the sign where it said when the next event was. Another student said "I used to feel uncomfortable in the dorms. Everyone

was just coming out of high school and I would hear things a lot like: 'Oh gosh did you hear she was gay… I just don't know about her anymore…'"

One student felt uncomfortable expressing her sexuality to her Resident Advisor (RA) because she perceived a division between lesbians and gay males in the residence halls. She said, "I felt that on my floor there was such a division between groups in general so I didn't go to him [my RA] and tell him that I'm a lesbian even though he is gay. Some gay guys really don't like lesbians." Unfortunately, LGBQ participants expressed many instances of homophobia or rejection from peers in the residence halls, while some even shared shared experiences of being forced out of their assigned room or knowing others who experienced this behavior.

Students living in the residence halls were also critical of programs put on by ORL for not fully representing issues of interest for LGBQ residents. During one incident described by a participant, an RA approached him/her to invite him/her to a discussion meant to promote safe sex; however, this program centered on heterosexual sexual health issues, resulting in feelings of exclusion for this student (T1, P17, 20-29). Another student described efforts by ORL to put on a drag show as somewhat uninformed. He said: "I thought that was so problematic that this hall was hosting a drag show… how dare you host a drag show if you have no idea what drag means?! Like that is so disrespectful to the drag community and just disrespectful to the work that these drag women do. To me that was really offensive." To this comment, another student conceded, "Yeah like there's still a lot of ignorance in the programs they put on." In general, participants described experiences that resulted in them feeling that housing spaces were heteronormative at best and homophobic at worst.

e. Extracurricular Activities

Although students spoke about a variety of student organizations and activities, Athletics and Greek organizations were explicitly referenced in almost every focus group. Participants perceived these spaces as heteronormative, and at times homophobic. For many students, these perceptions dissuaded them from participating in these spaces, particularly in Greek life. One student who was involved in Greek life initially described his experiences as positive but eventually qualified his description by saying that he had experienced discomfort with the forced primacy of his LGB identity in his fraternity (T5, P12, 40-46 & P13, 1-6). Another student described dancing with a same sex partner at a party and experiencing "so many eyes from across the room just staring" (T5, P6, 23-27), resulting in negative feelings in that space.

UCLA Athletics was labeled as heteronormative or homophobic although participants did acknowledge that this was part of a larger sports culture that went beyond UCLA (T4, P16, 7-22). Students who did not participate in athletics teams recalled hearing remarks like "don't be a fag" that have been made by students in UCLA athlete attire. LGBQ student athletes recounted more overt instances of homophobic behaviors, such as being "outed" by teammates or the less than favorable responses from their coaches upon learning of their sexual orientation (T2, P8, 25-36).

A variety of other departments and student organizations and activities were also critiqued by participants due to their perceived treatment of LGB persons. The Community Programs Office, although only discussed briefly, was described as a heteronormative and homophobic space. Particpiants shared that when criticisms were brought to the attention of the Office, they were ignored, as were LGBQ sensitivity training attempts. Students were very vocal in asserting that this was an unwelcoming environment (T4, P49, 6-10).

Organizations with a history of intolerance of LGBQ identities, such as religious or certain ethnic groups were also felt to be unwelcoming. In one instance, a student approached a religious group on campus to participate in Ally Week and was bluntly told "No, we believe [being LGBQ] is a sin. We believe they go to hell." (T5, P29, 35-36). On the other hand, students did find student groups centered around activities that did not make social identity salient. Those who did not wish to make their LGBQ status the center of their interaction with other students welcomed such groups. For example, one student said, "[in] my acappella group, everyone is really friendly, like no one cares that you're gay" (T3, P30, 11-12). Therefore, although some spaces were perceived as heteronormative or homophobic, other groups were more welcoming and did not centralize social identity in the pursuit of various activities.

IV. Recommendations from Participants

Participants provided recommendations for improving the experience of LGBQ undergraduate students at UCLA. Students made recommendations for improv-

ing support services and for improving quality of social and academic life. The majority of recommendations were geared toward improving services provided by the LGBT Center and the Office of Residential Life. What follows is an overview of recommendations for Student Affairs and for the campus at large.

a. The LGBT Center

Although the LGBT Center was described as a symbol of acceptance and support on campus, students still had suggestions for improving the services provided by the Center. For one, students wanted the LGBT Center to outreach to students of color, non-male students, and those who are not already part of the center through their friendship networks. For example, one student suggested, "…more outreach from the center or from the hill, if there were more programs to say like, Oh here are the resources that you could use', and making them more well-known…" (T1, P23, 11-19). To recruit more students of color, students suggested QPOC [Queer People of Color] events be held on an ongoing basis: "I think the center could go out of its way to put on more QPOC related events" (T1, P22, 27-33).

Although students felt the LGBT Center provided valuable resources, they ultimately felt that those resources served only a small number of LGBQ individuals. Some acknowledged that it was their own desire to keep their LGBQ identity private that led them to stay away from the resources provided by the LGBT Center. Thus, students did acknowledge that the Center, being right in the center of campus, was a more appropriate resource for those with a more fully developed LGBQ identity. Participants identified a need for support for students at all stages of the developmental spectrum: from those questioning or exploring their identity, to those comfortable enough to be seen entering a known LGBQ space. As one participant said:

> People here at UCLA [may be] self-aware that they are –LGB, but it's like they can't go all the way to that third step of going to the center with rainbow flags. They first gotta go to a space that's a lot more discreet, so UCLA I don't think provides a space for those people who are trying to take that first step out of the closet (T5, P19, 39-46).

Participants shared that the absence of support for LGBQ students who are less than comfortable outing themselves to access support was a need that must be addressed. Students recommended additional supports for LGBQ students who are not likely to use the LGBT Center.

b. Office of Residential Life

Students felt that the Office of Residential Life needed to improve programming and services for LGBQ students. Far too many participants had their most hurtful experiences while living in University housing and described how such negative experiences shaped their overall college experiences. For example, one participant described the common experience of having to move to accommodate a homophobic roommate. He said, "I was with someone who wasn't accepting. I actually had to switch dorms. I was a double in the fall and 3rd week I had to move into a single" (T1, P15, 22-24). Participants said that a lack of information or familiarity among heterosexual students about LGBQ people and issues consistently made it difficult to find accepting roommates.

c. Campus Resources

Students emphasized the need for educational materials and workshops to promote understanding and acceptance of LGBQ individuals in the broader UCLA community in addition to more and better advertised resources for LGBQ students. Students said that UCLA Orientation, in particular, could do a better job of advertising existing resources to LGBQ students and providing education to non-LGBQ students. For example, one student suggested workshops on LGBQ issues for all students:

> I think there needs to be some point during orientation, [since they already] illustrate that you shouldn't cheat and this is what happens if you cheat and have a workshop on sexual assault, they should have this whole big workshop on like, here's the LGBT resources, like this is what happens if your friend comes out to you, like this is how to be a better ally. Because honestly people are coming like right from high school where they'll have, they still have that idea in their brains about [how harmful comments like] "Ohh that's so gay, blah blah blah," "I have a gay friend… and so I know everything about blah …" (T4, P9, 7-15).

Another student underscored the need for workshops focused on LGBQ resources at Orientation: "Let peo-

ple be aware of [resources] before you come to campus because when you come to campus, you're new. You don't really know anyone. Yeah you could just go to the LGBQ Center but that is just like red flagging it." This student underscores the need for having and making students aware of a variety of resources for the LGBQ population that is not comfortable accessing highly visible forms of support like the LGBT Center. Ultimately, students expressed concerns that existing resources were not adequately advertised to students throughout campus, and that existing supports do not adequately meet the needs of LGBQ students, particularly those with less than fully developed LGBQ identities. Furthermore, participants said that educational resources need to be made available to non-LGBQ students in order to improve the overall climate at UCLA.

d. Academics

Students described the undergraduate student body as divided by those willing to take LGBT courses and those who were not. Many stated that the LGBT curriculum needed to be extended beyond those who continue to enroll in LGBT courses. For example, one participant said "… if we're hitting the same people, we're not working, then we're not really moving forward" (T2, P27, 15-27). Participants called for a diversity requirement within general education that would require students to take a course relating to the LGBQ community. The diversity requirement was seen as a potential way to bridge the perceived divide between LGBQ students and their heterosexual peers. "It'd be nice if we learned about all these other stuff, but I think you find acceptance when you know about people's history," one student said (T2, P27,31-32).

Related to complaints about the lack of LGBQ course taking patterns by heterosexual students, participants demanded greater support and visibility for the LGBT Studies minor. Many felt that support for the academic study of LGBQ issues would foster a greater sense of inclusion among LGBQ students and promote learning for all students. One student said, "I think the LGBT studies department is great and the classes are amazing… but there's not a lot of support for it to become a major and I think that's the problem" (T1, P1, 10-14). Participants felt more support for the LGBT Studies minor could generate a stronger presence on campus and generate increased awareness of LGBQ issues.

Participants believed that having professors familiar with LGBQ issues would also improve the experiences of LGBQ students. Many felt that professors were unaware of LGBQ issues. One student com mented, "…I mean [professors are like,] "what's homosexuals?" I mean they don't even know some basic information about homosexuals… so I think if there is some education activity on campus, things will be better" (T5, P24, 41-46). By having faculty knowledgeable of the LGBQ community and the issues they face, students could participate in more inclusive and safe classroom environments.

Recommendations from the URPI Research Team

Based on focus group findings and recommendations made by study participants, members of the URPI research team synthesized a number of recommended actions that would make UCLA a more welcoming and inclusive environment. A primary step toward improved campus climate would be recognizing that it is not the sole responsibility of the LGBT Center to support LGBQ students. Rather, it is the responsibility of the entire UCLA community to ensure a safe and welcoming learning environment for students of all backgrounds. Given that the LGBT Center can provide only a limited number of services to students who are willing and able to take advantage of them, it is recommended that UCLA provide additional resources to LGBQ students at varying stages of LGBQ identity development. In other words, the LGBT Center should continue to remain hyper-visible but there should be more services available to those who are not comfortable outing themselves in order to find support.

In addition to providing services and support to a broader LGBQ student population, it is recommended that Student Affairs provide staff with training so that they may better support LGBQ students. This may involve training in dealing with sensitive issues, special student populations, or teaching students to respond to microaggressions. The Office of Residential Life might implement LGBQ themed floors throughout residence halls and better train Residential Assistants (RAs) to deal with roommate conflicts involving LGBQ individuals. Furthermore, Orientation should better train tour guides to point out resources available to LGBQ individuals and be prepared to address questions and comments from incoming LGBQ students.

More broadly, UCLA must promote gender-neutral/ non-heteronormative language, starting with faculty and staff. Using language like "partner" instead of "boyfriend" or "you all" instead of "you guys" would

create a more welcoming and inclusive academic environment. Also, designing a curriculum inclusive of LGBQ issues and other diverse perspectives would further promote the learning and development of all students.

Conclusion

Findings from our qualitative study of LGBQ undergraduate experiences suggest that UCLA is generally tolerant of diverse student populations, but must continue to take action if it is to become a fully welcoming and accepting learning environment. While participants expressed a lack of a cohesive LGBQ community, some did find a sense of belonging within the LGBT Center, student groups, or within social science courses that allowed for deeper exploration of LGBQ issues. What is clear from the data is that the types of supports students utilized rested heavily on how they saw themselves within the context of an LGBQ identity. Those who had a strong sense of their identity became leaders, offering support and information to others. Those who were less comfortable being seen as LGBQ found it harder to find support that would not make their identity immediately known to peers on campus. Ultimately, we learned that the experiences of LGBQ students are complex and that the services and supports they require must be just as varied.

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