A Foucauldian analysis of Asian/American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students’ Process of Disclosing their Sexual Orientation and Its Impact on Identity Construction

Dissertation

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Abstract

In recent years, the number of traditional-aged Asian/American gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) college students has steadily increased. Despite this trend, this population has largely been neglected within the research literature. As a group, Asian/American GLB students are distinctively positioned within society, facing pressures from the Asian/American, White, heterosexual, and GLB communities. The purpose of this study was to better understand how and why Asian/American GLB students disclosed their sexual orientation to others during college and the impact of that disclosure on their construction of identity. Methodologically, a Fouaculdian analysis (particularly situational analysis) was conducted with the primary data sources being semi-structured interviews; secondary sources included documents (including blogs, Facebook posts, and personal essays), participant observations, and fieldwork. Overall, the goal of this study was to find out how disclosing one’s sexual orientation affected the study’s participants’ experiences in college.
Defining My Research

When people outside of academia ask me about my dissertation topic, I often give a simple reply. “I am studying Asian gay, lesbian, and bisexual students.” In response, I get uncomfortable looks, and the person usually changes the topic. When I talk to those within academia, the conversation is often more in depth, but interestingly, no one has asked me about my own sexual orientation. I make no pretenses about hiding my heterosexuality; I freely talk about having a boyfriend. However, I am left to wonder if people just assume that the only reason I would study this group is because I identify as lesbian or bisexual.

These encounters illustrate why I took on this study. Sexual orientation and sexual identity are topics that we do not freely talk about in our society and especially within Asian/American circles. My parents are from Japan and immigrated to the United States before I was born. They had the option of returning to Japan right after I was born but chose not to do so. My parents wanted to raise my sister and me in an environment that did not have the same social constraints as Japan and felt that the United States offered opportunities for us to express ourselves freely. In spite of this relative freedom, I cannot say with 100 percent confidence that they would be accepting of me if I was a lesbian or bisexual because I never talked with them about the topic.

So, with this study, I hope to be a catalyst and provide a voice for Asian/American GLB individuals. As people learn about their experiences, my hope is
that they will no longer be uncomfortable in situations related to sexual identity and will no longer carry any stereotypes related to Asian/American GLB experience.

Of note, the participants in my study were both Asian American and Asian international students. I will refer to them collectively as Asian/American and will specifically define any subpopulations when necessary. Palumbo-Liu (1999) best summarizes my decision to use the solidus when he states, “As in the construction ‘and/or’ where the solidus at once instantiates a choice between two terms, their simultaneous and equal status, and an element of indecidability, that is, as it at once implies both exclusion and inclusion, ‘Asian/American’ makes both the distinction between ‘Asian’ and ‘American’ and a dynamic, unsettled, and inclusive movement” (p. 1). By utilizing the solidus, I want to maintain the distinction between the Asian international and Asian American students, while also maintaining the equality between the two groups. As Palumbo-Liu acknowledges, this distinction can be unsettling, as it should force the reader to consider them both individually and as a collective.
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Most importantly, for Adam, Beth, Carrie, Dan, Edward, Frances, Gabby, Howard, and Ian, living the Asian/American GLB lifestyle had been complex and at times difficult. I want to express my gratitude for letting me become a part of their lives and sharing their experiences so openly with me. I hope that by sharing your stories and voices, others will come to realize the complexities and difficulties associated with being an Asian/American gay, lesbian, or bisexual individual in today’s world.
Vita

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Chapter 1: Overview

Introduction

Actually, I try to be openly gay because I was Asian. Because like most people don’t think that especially . . . it is my floor, I mean my floor is International Housing. There are a lot of international students like from Korea and from China and most Korean people don’t think that there is any gay guys any place in the country or something. That’s why I was like okay here I am. There’s gay guy from South Korea so I hope you guys please understand that there is some[one] who’s gay no matter what their nationalities are. So that was one of the impact on me. Because I’m Asian I try to be open as much as possible. Because it is really hard to find ANY Asian gay guys whose open on campus even in [area omitted]. It is a really gay population; like the most gay population . . . . But even I mean at the same time, . . . I feel like I am a victim of the whole double minority stuff because as I said, I am concerned about what [they] will think of me because I’m gay and what will they think of me because I’m gay because I’m Asian. – Adam (pseudonym used), sophomore, international student.

Adam’s description illustrates the struggles that Asian/American gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) college students face when deciding whether to reveal their sexual orientation to others. In this case, Adam was looking for a community but to this point, had not found what he termed “Asian gay guys.” This lack of community was what
motivated him to be open about his sexual orientation. At the same time, he was concerned about what others would think of him, both because of his sexual orientation and ethnicity.

Adam’s situation and story is indicative of how non-White and non-heterosexual students struggle to find their sense of self within the college environment (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Kawaguchi, 2003; Stevens, 2004). While this struggle has been widely studied within higher education and student affairs, this body of work has focused on students who largely identify with one group or trait, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998; Jones & McEwen, 2000). Only recently has higher education and student affairs research grown to include groups other than White, Western, heterosexual men as research subjects (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004).

In addition, research on gay, lesbian, or bisexual students’ coming out experience has largely focused on the White population (Clark, 2005; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, & Parsons, 2006). While these studies have been useful to increase our understanding of the impact of disclosing one’s sexual orientation, as Adam’s statement indicates, students who are also an ethnic minority have many factors to consider when deciding to reveal their sexual orientation to others.

Finally, Asian/American student research has been limited in focus and does not consider the impact of having multiple marginalized identity traits on the college experience (Kawaguchi, 2003; Ying et al., 2001). Therefore, when considering the identity formation process and coming out experience for Asian/American GLB students, a deeper understanding, one that goes beyond studying single identity traits, is needed.
This study explored how multiple marginalized identity traits, in this case race/ethnicity and sexual orientation, influenced the educational experience and the identity formation of Asian/American GLB college students. Specifically, I asked the following research questions (1) What are the factors/issues that leads Asian/American GLB students to disclose their sexual orientation? (2) How does the experience of disclosing their sexual identity affect their sense of self (i.e., construction of identity)? and (3) In what ways does a changing construction of identity impact their educational experience? Michel Foucault’s works were used to theoretically frame and explain the findings of this study.

The goal of this study was to provide a new and different perspective on the identity formation process of Asian/American GLB students. In this first chapter, I explain the emergence of the Asian/American GLB student population, why studying the disclosure process is important, and provide a brief historical context from which we have come to understand Asian/Americans and their sexuality. Finally, I provide a general overview of the study and organization of the rest of this dissertation.

Purpose and Significance

Emergence of Asian/American GLB Students

Asian/Americans are one of the fastest growing groups of students within United States higher education. From 1996 to 2003, Asian American (defined by the United States Census and includes non-citizens of Asian decent) student enrollment increased 31.6% or by 282,000 students (Ryu, 2009). Of that increase, Asian American women outnumbered men, increasing 44.0% versus 27.9% for men. As of 2004, nearly 950,000 undergraduate Asian American students were enrolled in higher education (KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007). Also, nearly 60% of all 18-24 year
old Asian American students were enrolled in higher education, making their participation rate the highest among any racial or ethnic minority group (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In addition, these numbers do not include students from other countries studying in the United States. During the 2008-2009 academic year, over 670,000 students from foreign countries were studying in the United States, of which a majority, nearly 390,000, were from U.S. Census defined Asian countries (Gardner, Witherell, & Soman, 2009). Combined, nearly 1.4 million Asian students are enrolled in higher education.

Participation rates for non-racial minority groups, such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) students are more difficult to obtain; the demographic characteristics on admissions applications do not ask about sexual orientation. As a result, statistics regarding GLB student enrollment is more anecdotal. However, with the average coming out age now between 14 and 16 years old (down from 21 in 1979) (Marklein, 2004; Ryan, 2003; Tamashiro, 2007), many more young adults are starting higher education aware of their sexual orientation (Marklein, 2004). These statistics reflect the increased likelihood that GLB students of all backgrounds, including Asian/Americans, are enrolling into colleges and universities nationwide.

Asian/American GLB students’ emergence within higher education warrants the need to further study their college experiences. As their enrollment numbers increase, the issues that they face cannot be ignored. Their double marginalized status means that they face challenges to adapt to the White, heterosexual, and Asian communities. Within the context of this study, the challenges adapting to the White community was particularly
salient as the campus and surrounding community was White dominant. These issues will be further explored in later chapters of this dissertation.

“Coming Out”

“Coming out” or disclosing one’s sexual orientation is a significant part of the GLB identity formation process (Cass, 1979; Evans & Broido, 1999; Tamashiro, 2007). Coming out can be defined as both the internal and external recognition of one’s membership into a sexual minority group (Tamashiro, 2007). Many theories of sexual identity formation (e.g., see Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994a) center around this acknowledgement of one’s sexual orientation. However, the expectations and ideals associated with coming out have been largely constructed around White, heterosexual norms (Clark, 2005; Hahm & Adkins, 2009; Han, 2001; Rasmussen, 2004; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). As a result, GLB individuals feel pressure to come out in a specific way, and failure to meet these expectations leads them to being ostracized from both the White GLB and White heterosexual communities (Clark, 2005; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2008).

This study explored the process that led to the internal and external acknowledgement of Asian/American GLB students’ sexual identity. In addition, the impact of that process on their sense of self and on their overall educational experience is discussed. The findings are explained by centering and framing the discussion around the works and concepts of Michel Foucault (1970; 1977a; 1977b; 1978). Understanding these phenomena from a Foucauldian perspective is a departure from previous research on the identity formation process, which has utilized a developmental, psychosocial approach (e.g., see Cass, 1979; D’Augelli, 1994a; Kim, 1981b; Phinney, 1989). This psychosocial
approach essentializes and universalizes student identity development and fails to acknowledge the possibility of identity beyond what is being studied at the moment; these psychosocial theories also do not fully consider the impact of multiple identities on identity formation. Foucault’s concepts are constructed to allow for multiple possibilities and multiple forms of reality. As a result, Foucault’s work can facilitate a new and different type of perspective about how Asian/American GLB students come to develop and form their self-identity, which will ultimately serve to expand the knowledge base.

**Historical Context**

Understanding the difficulties Asian/American GLB students face when acknowledging their sexual identity to themselves and others first requires an understanding of the context from which both Asian/American and GLB oppression developed. While Asian/American history goes back many years, the roots of contemporary Asian/American college student oppression centers around the model minority myth and figure of yellow peril. While both concepts will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, in summary, the model minority myth “suggests that Asian Americans are a monolithic group that enjoys overwhelming success in the education sector, even when there is empirical evidence to the contrary” (Buenavista, Jayakumar, & Misa-Escalante, 2009, p. 70). The figure of yellow peril contributes to highlighting the achievements of Asian/Americans while also using these achievements to exclude them from policies and procedures (Wu, 2002). The model minority myth has been perpetuated by aggregate numbers, which suggest that Asian/Americans have been more successful in completing higher education (e.g., see Cook & Cordova, 2006; Ryu, 2009). However, when these numbers are disaggregated, many subpopulations within the Asian/American
community are at a socioeconomic and educational disadvantage when compared to their White counterparts (Museus & Kiang, 2009). This myth, along with the idea of Asian/Americans as the figure of yellow peril, contributes to creating an environment that favors the White college student experience and racializes the experiences of Asian/American individuals, as many assume that Asian/American students do not need support through their education.

When considering the oppression of GLB college students, Wolf (2009) presents an interesting perspective centered on capitalism. She contends that modern Western capitalist society, one that privileges heterosexual marriage and relationships is what has led to the current heterosexist and homophobic climate. In this climate, heterosexual behavior and traditional gender roles are rewarded and non-normative behavior is often oppressed or punished. This heterosexist and homophobic climate is also evident in higher education, where capitalism contributes to supporting an environment where sexual minorities feel that they must conceal their orientation to others, for fear of retribution by their peers, faculty, or staff (Rankin, 2003; Rankin, 2005). Thus, historically, the college environment can be hostile for GLB students; this environment can impact their perceptions of themselves and their sexual orientation.

Besides the challenges within the college environment due to their sexual orientation, Asian/American GLB individuals also face challenges due to the model minority myth. Behind this model minority myth is an expectation that Asian/American students be “good” children, “save face,” and maintain a specific public persona (Kimmel & Huso, 2004). This expectation that they must be a ideal child is particularly difficult when they are attracted to those of the same sex. Often parents project these model
minority expectations onto their children; they expect their children to be in heteroerosexual relationships and start a family. These different expectations and challenges create a unique situation that Asian/American GLB students have to manage. This situation is what will be further examined in this study.

When considering the Asian/American GLB college student experience, the importance of how Asian/American sexuality and sexual identity has been historically constructed should not be overlooked. Historically, Asian/American male and female identities have been constructed in dichotomous and binary ways (Espiritu, 1997, 2008). For example, the first wave of Asian immigrants were primarily Chinese men, who served as laborers during the expansion of the West (Takaki, 1998/1989). This influx and fear of their population growth led to Asian/American men being portrayed in Western society as a sexual threat to White women and as a military threat to the United States (Espiritu, 2008). Regulations prevented these men from inter racially marrying or from bringing their wives with them to the United States (Espiritu, 2008; Wong & Santa Ana, 1999). Eventually, these regulations led to their relative seclusion and the proliferation of “bachelor societies.” As a result, Asian/American men went from being a sexual threat to being portrayed within the media as passive, asexual beings who either lacked sexual drive or were fulfilling homosexual desire (Espiritu, 2008; Shah, 2001). As history has evolved, Asian/American men have continued to be associated with this asexual yet oversexed stereotype. These stereotypes contribute to maintaining the representation of the Asian man as a threat to White society.

On the other hand, Asian/American women have been portrayed as hypersexual, ultra-feminine beings, either as a predator or as a passive, feminine servant (Espiritu,
The first images of Asian/American women were of the Dragon Lady, the hypersexual, villainess (Espiritu, 2008; Gee, 1988). These images were created based on the first wave of Asian/American women to the United States, who mainly served as prostitutes for White men (Takaki, 1998/1989). As Asian/Americans became more accepted within American society through World War II and the Cold War, the image changed to that of the Lotus Blossom, the docile, yet hypersexual servant. Whereas White women have been considered chaste and pure, Asian/American women have been considered promiscuous and untrustworthy (Espiritu, 2008); their identity has been constructed around their hypersexuality. As a result, Asian/American women have been made into exotic yet alluring sexual beings (Wong & Santa Ana, 1999).

With the images of Asian/American men and women as passive yet hypersexual beings, they have been constructed to be a threat to pictures of respectable domesticity (i.e., the White, heterosexual family) (Shah, 2001). Because of their immigrant status, Asian/Americans are considered “outsiders” or “invaders” to the traditional, White family. Because of historically constructed images of passive, hypersexuality, they are also considered sexual deviants, falling outside heterosexual norms. These images of Asian/Americans as sexual deviants have continued into modern day society. For example, modern day portrayals of Asian/American women have made these women exotic objects of desire (Gee, 1988). An example of this can be seen in the modern day musical Miss Saigon. In the musical, a U.S. Marine falls in love with a Vietnamese woman during the Vietnam War. Eventually, they separate, and the Marine remarries a White, American woman. When forced to decide, he chooses to stay with the American woman, and the Asian woman then kills herself. In the play, the Vietnamese woman is
introduced as a prostitute, thus an object of desire; ultimately, she is cast aside in favor of the chaste, American woman (Wikipedia, 2010).

Stereotypes of Asian/American gays and lesbians have been based on these images of Asian/American women and men. They are further challenged because their sexual orientation already falls outside the heterosexual norms. Many Asian/American GLB individuals struggle to combat an expectation that they are erotic, yet passive sexual partners (Kumashiro, 1999; Poon & Ho, 2008). Many Asian/American sexual minorities internalize these stereotypes, leading them to seek White partners who believe in these images (Poon & Ho, 2008). Thus, the challenge for Asian/American GLB individuals is to define themselves outside of these sexualized stereotypes.

Study Design

In this study, I used a constructionist epistemology and Foucauldian theoretical framework. In constructionism, multiple realities are considered possible, and engagement between the researcher and participants is crucial (Kuh & Andreas, 1991). This engagement allows for a breadth of data that cannot be obtained through traditional quantitative methods (Kuh & Andreas, 1991). The primary source of data was semi-structured interviews; participants were asked to explain their reasoning behind disclosing or concealing their sexual orientation to others. They were also asked general questions about their educational and overall life experiences. In addition, participant observation and document analysis were used, mostly to supplement and collaborate the participants’ statements made during the interviews. The method of data analysis was situational analysis (Clarke, 2005). This method of data analysis helped to explain the process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation to others within a Foucauldian, discursive
framework. The subjects for this study were Asian American and Asian international GLB undergraduate and graduate students at a large Midwestern university. The focus of this study was only on gay, lesbian, and bisexual students. While transsexual and/or transgender students are often included in the research literature, in this case, the focus was on sexual orientation rather than gender expression.

As previously noted, the foundation for the theoretical framework in this study was the works of Michel Foucault, and particularly the works related to discourse, biopower, sexuality, agency, knowledge and truth (1970; 1977a; 1977b; 1978). Unlike traditional humanistic, positivist perspectives, which are the basis for age-linked identity development theories, poststructuralism focuses on discourses and social practices (St. Pierre, 2000), with an emphasis on questioning the “self-undermining and self-deconstructing character of discourse” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 5). By conducting an in-depth analysis of these discourses, including how they are formed and perceived by the individuals living in them, one can analyze the way in which individuals formulate beliefs about their personal identities.

Foucault’s major concepts provides a framework that clarifies Asian/American GLB students’ decision-making process when deciding to reveal their sexual orientation. Discourses consist of different norms, values, and beliefs that lead to a prescribed way of viewing the world (Foucault, 1977a). From these discourses, power, including biopower, arises. This power is the foundation for building and establishing relationships with others (Foucault, 1977a). I found that these relationship dynamics were what students base their decision about disclosure or concealment of their sexual orientation. In addition, since resistance by subjects is inevitable within Foucauldian discourses
(Foucault, 1977a), agency, or the degree to which the subjects define themselves outside yet within a discourse, is also inevitable. Agency was therefore a way to explain how the students formed a sense of self-identity. With this type of discursive analysis, the goal was to provide a more nuanced understanding of these students’ experiences that current theories and research do not provide.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into several parts. In Chapter 2, I review the literature on Asian/American college students and their identity development. In Chapter 3, I explore the evolution of sexual identity development theories and the theories involving the intersections of identity. Chapter 4 includes overviews of the key Foucauldian concepts used in this study. Chapter 5 provides detailed information involving the study design and execution. Finally, in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. I summarize the results and draw conclusions based on the findings. I conclude in Chapter 9 by discussing the implications of the results, limitations to the study, and potential directions for future research.
Chapter 2: Asian/American College Students

Asian/American Student Population Characteristics

Overall, the Asian/American population is heterogeneous, with a large amount of cultural diversity (Hune, 2002; Takaki, 1998/1989). This diversity, due in part to increased immigration, means that Asian/Americans are increasing in number; they currently comprise of 5.1% of the population, with most on the West Coast and most concentrated in California. The number is expected to increase to 15% by 2050 (Barnes & Bennett, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). This boom also corresponds to the previously mentioned increase in the number of Asian/American college students.

The 2000 Census identified 25 Asian subgroups, categorized by geographic origin. A majority identified with a geographic origin of China, followed by the Philippines and India (Barnes & Bennett, 2002). In addition, over 68% of those who indicated they were Asian were foreign-born (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.), meaning they were not U.S. citizens at birth (Larsen, 2004). This heterogeneity is reflected in terms of language proficiency and family structure. Those with English as a primary language were likely born in the United States; whereas foreign born Asian/Americans likely speak several languages, which mean students come to college with varying levels of language proficiency (Hune, 2002). For college students, the country of origin also has implications with regards to family expectations. Second generation (i.e., born in the United States from immigrant parents) and 1.5 generation (i.e., born outside of the United
States but immigrated at an early age) Asian/American students are often socialized into the U.S. racial hierarchy and thus use that hierarchy as their frame of reference (Wiley, Perkins, & Deaux, 2008); this socialization creates conflicts with their parents who have different expectations based on their own country of origin.

Asian/American students earn the most bachelor’s degrees in business, followed by the social sciences and engineering (Cook & Cordova, 2006). Similarly, most earn master’s degrees in business, followed closely by education, health professions, and engineering. During a ten year period from 1993-94 to 2003-04, Asian/Americans nearly doubled the number of doctoral degrees earned in the health professions, biological / life sciences, and humanities (Cook & Cordova, 2006). During that same ten year period, Asian/American students had a 74.0 percent increase in the number of earned associate degrees, a 68.9 percent increase in bachelor’s degrees, and a 92.0 percent increase in earned master’s degrees, compared to only an 11 percent increase in the number of White student earning bachelor’s degrees, and 22 percent in master’s degrees (Cook & Cordova, 2006). These statistics illustrate the growing presence that Asian/American students have within higher education.

Studies on Asian International Students

International students originating from Asian countries are also a majority of international students studying in the United States (Gardner et al., 2009). These students have additional challenges when studying at U.S. colleges and universities. They have to adapt to a different culture, language, and educational system (Nilsson, Butler, Shouse, & Joshi, 2008; Poyrazil, Kavanaugh, Baker, & Al-Timimi, 2004) while also managing the stereotypes and assumptions associated with Asian American students. Nilsson et al.
(2008) found a significant relationship between Asian international students perceived prejudice and their stress levels. In other words, perceived prejudice, i.e., their feeling of being unaccepted or overlooked by Americans or feeling that their values are poorly received by others, significantly impacted their amount of stress. These results have numerous implications, as Asian international students are not likely to seek out counseling services to address their issues (Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004).

Language differences particularly impact Asian international students as it affects their ability to interact socially and academically (Chen, 1999; Olivas & Li, 2006). The language difference contributes to making these students feel socially isolated and leads to pessimistic attitudes about succeeding academically. The differences between the Asian and U.S. academic systems also contributes to these feelings of pessimism. The U.S. higher education system focuses on individualism, competition, and assertiveness; these qualities are antithetical to Asian values where the teacher acts as a parent, telling the students what to learn and do in the classroom (Sheehan & Pearson, 1995). These differences in values can affect how these students perform and ultimately succeed at the university level.

Because Asian international students are adapting to U.S. culture, they are faced with additional stressors beyond what Asian American students experience. These cultural differences also impact Asian international GLB students because they need to manage the stressors associated with being an international student while also managing their sexual orientation within a new and different culture.

Model Minority Myth
In spite of this group heterogeneity, one of the biggest challenges Asian/American college students face is being collectively stereotyped as a “model minority.” The model minority is defined as “a nonwhite group whose members have managed to ‘make it’ in America despite a long history of being subjected to myriad forms of discrimination” (Chan & Wang, 1991, p. 44). Academically, these students are expected to be high academic achievers prior to attending a college class. This stereotype creates the perception that Asian/American students have fewer social and psychological problems (Rhoads, Lee, & Yamada, 2002; Solberg, Ritsma, Davis, Tata, & Jolly, 1994), and do not need any help adjusting to college (Kawaguchi, 2003).

When viewed collectively, Asian/American college students appear to be relatively successful in college. Asian/Americans have one of the highest educational attainment rates of any minority group (Cook & Cordova, 2006). On average, they score higher than any other racial minority group on college entrance exams such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) (College Board, 2008). However, wide within group variations in overall higher education achievement exist. For example, in 1990, 66.5 percent of Chinese Americans enrolled in higher education versus only 26.3 percent of Laotian Americans (Hune, 2002). The wide range of socioeconomic and educational opportunities available to Asian/Americans account for much of this within group difference (Lee, 2006a). Thus, while Asian/American students appear to be successful in college, these statistics do not account for the significant within group variance. Because they statistically appear to be well adjusted to college, researchers have paid little attention to addressing or studying their needs.
This perceived success has led to Asian/Americans being de-minoritized (i.e., have services and programs removed) within higher education (Lee, 2006b). For example, Asian/American students often do not have equitable access to services such as counseling because of the perception that they are psychologically adjusted to the university environment (Cress & Ikeda, 2003; Suzuki, 2002); administrators believe that providing such services for this particular group of students is an unnecessary use of resources. In reality, these students have unique psychological needs that can be addressed in counseling (Gloria & Ho, 2003; Lucas & Berkel, 2005). For example, Asian/American students can experience a “culture clash” when they have conflict between their parents’ Asian cultural values and their own desire to adhere to Westernized standards (Sue & Sue, 1993). They may also have difficulty balancing school with family obligations (Ng, Lee, & Pak, 2007). Thus, while Asian/American students may appear to be successful because of their completion rates, they face much internal conflict. They may have an overall lower sense of coherence, i.e., more difficulty managing their overall environment (Ying et al., 2001). While Asian/American students statistically may appear to be successful, administrators need to analyze these statistics in more detail and carefully consider these students’ entire college experience.

This model minority myth creates pressure for Asian/American GLB students to live up to these high academic expectations. At the same time, many are struggling with issues related to their sexual orientation and sexual identity, from both the majority and from their families, who expect them to be “model” children in heterosexual relationships (Kimmel & Huso, 2004). Because of the lack of acknowledgement that Asian/American students have psychological problems, these GLB students are not likely to seek out
counseling services. Others assume, because they are Asian/American, that they do not have any problems adjusting to the college environment. As a result, Asian/American GLB individuals have been largely neglected, leading to a general invisibility within the campus community.

Yellow Peril

This invisibility is further perpetuated by the construction of Asian/Americans as the figure of “yellow peril” or perpetual foreigner (Ng et al., 2007). The majority highlights their success and makes the Asian/American a “pull yourself up by the bootstraps” figure, yet also uses the myth as a way to justify their exclusion from policies and procedures, thus setting them up to be the “perpetual foreigner” (Wu, 2002).

By highlighting the achievement of Asian/Americans, the dominant culture can highlight the underachievement of other groups, particularly African Americans (Lee, 2006b; Ng et al., 2007). Asian/Americans students’ perceived successes had led those in the majority to question why other racial groups have not had similar achievements and overcome similar racial hurdles. Subsequently, Asian/American students are often the target of discrimination and feel that they are treated unfairly by majority and minority students, faculty and staff (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000); they experience backlash from other groups because of their perceived success. This comparison silences the achievements of African Americans (and other minority racial / ethnic groups) and privileges the White student experience (Ng et al., 2007).

The model minority myth serves to “other” Asian/American students and is an example of how racism plays out in today’s higher education system (Ng et al., 2007). Asian/American students who internalize the model minority myth are less likely to use
ethnic support services (Yang, Byers, Ahuna, & Castro, 2002). These students believe in the dominant discourse and believe they can be successful through hard work, in spite of any challenges they actually face. Their internalization of the myth demonstrates the systemic way in which the model minority myth permeates higher education. To overcome this stereotype and change the dominant discourse, administrators need to first reexamine their own assumptions and beliefs about Asian/Americans. Only then can they truly work toward making the college experience better for these students.

Because they are potential targets of racial discrimination, Asian/Americans students have difficulty finding a safe community beyond their immediate racial group. This difficulty has particular implications for Asian/American GLB students as they can face homophobic behavior if they disclose their sexual orientation to others. This lack of a safe community creates additional challenges for these students as they complete their education.

**Asian American Identity Development**

Many of today’s Asian American identity development theories are influenced by these stereotypes of the yellow peril and model minority. The model minority myth is one reason that limited research on Asian/American college student development currently exists (Kawaguchi, 2003; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2001). As Kodama et al. (2001) point out, in the book, *Student Development in College: Theory, Research and Practice* (Evans et al., 1998), the authors, when discussing studies with students of color using Chickering and Reisser’s Seven Vector Theory, cite one study on Asian international students and none on Asian Americans. The following sections review the current body of research on Asian American identity development (solidus omitted
because the research subjects did not include international students), including the examination of two major identity development theories using Asian American students as subjects. This current state of research on Asian/American students illustrates how a study specifically examining the experience of Asian/American GLB students is warranted.

Asian American Identity Development Model (AAID)

Kim (1981a; 1981b; 2001) was one of the first people to develop a theory of Asian American identity development. In studying ten, third-generation Japanese American women, Kim determined that Asian Americans go through five “sequential and progressive” stages of identity development (Kim, 1981a, p. 2). These are (1) Ethnic Awareness, (2) White Identification, (3) Awakening to Social Political Consciousness, (4) Redirection to an Asian American Consciousness, and (5) Incorporation. The first stage, Ethnic Awareness, occurred in the research subjects prior to entrance into elementary school and involved being aware of and having a neutral to positive attitude about her Japanese heritage (Kim, 1981a). In subsequent stages, the subjects developed an identification with White culture (including a negative attitude about their Asian background) to developing a social/political consciousness as a minority and then as Asian American. In the final stage, Incorporation, they have integrated their understanding of their Asian American identity with all other aspects of themselves.

Central to Kim’s (1981a; 1981b) work is the assumption that Asian Americans experience identity conflict. Identity conflict is defined as “when an individual perceives certain aspects or attributes of him/herself which he/she rejects simultaneously” (Kim, 1981a, p. 3). For Asian Americans, this conflict involves the decision to reject their
ethnic identity in favor of adapting White values. The five stages include the initiation (Ethnic Awareness, White Identification), process (Awakening to Social Political Consciousness, Redirection to Asian American Consciousness), and resolution (Incorporation) of that conflict. For Kim, without this identity conflict, the evolution of Asian American identity would not be possible.

Kim (1981a; 1981b) acknowledges two key theories that are the foundation for the study. One theory involves the work of Erik Erickson (1968) and life-span developmental psychology. Kim believes that identity formation is developmental, i.e., changing and evolving to a higher level over time. From this perspective, identity formation is not a consequence of age but rather influenced by the interaction of that individual with the social environment. Kim’s results closely mirror Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development. In both theories, individuals are faced with a conflict to which a favorable outcome is possible. For example, in Erikson’s stage five, identity versus role confusion, individuals begin to question themselves and their roles in life. Successful resolution results in the individual having a solid identity; being unsuccessful results in identity confusion (Erikson, 1968). Similarly, in Redirection to Asian American Consciousness, individuals decide whether or not to continue identifying with all minorities or work to establish a closer connection to their Asian heritage. Successful resolution means that individuals move to Incorporation; failure leads to a state of foreclosure where individuals are unable to move forward (Kim, 1981a, 1981b).

The second major theoretical assumption that Kim (1981a; 1981b) makes is utilizing the Theory of Oppression (Bell, 1997). With this theory, the assumption is that society is predominantly White and racist. Therefore, minorities experience oppression
and are exploited in a way that benefits the majority. In constructing AAID, Kim assumes that Asian Americans are oppressed within society because of their ethnic status. In this case, social group membership as Asian American cannot be distinguished from individual identity; group membership leads to experiences of oppression that ultimately affects the identity development process. This oppressive matrix is integrated into everyday practice, thus making it difficult for others to challenge its power and rule (Bell, 1997). The AAID explores how individuals operate and evolve within that climate.

A major limitation to the study is Kim only studied third-generation Japanese American females. While Kim formally acknowledges this limitation, over time, the research has been over-generalized and applied to studies on other Asian Americans (e.g., see Kim, 2001). Taking into consideration the heterogeneity of the Asian American population, the validity of these results and transferability to populations other than Japanese American women is questionable at best. For example, while Kim’s results may be relevant to other Japanese American women, cultural differences and different gender expectations would make it difficult to draw similar conclusions in Laotian American men. Finally, Kim solely focuses on ethnic identity and ethnic identity conflict. He does not acknowledge how other identity traits, such as a minority sexual orientation, affects the identity development process.

Phinney’s Model of Ethnic Identity Development

Phinney (1989) first conducted research on Asian American, Black, Hispanic, and White tenth graders and concluded that adolescents can be in one of four states of ethnic identity development. Phinney then tested the results on college students (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). The first stage, diffusion, is the state where individuals have “little or no
exploration of one’s ethnicity and no clear understanding of the issues” (Phinney, 1989, p. 38). In the second stage, foreclosed, individuals have little to no exploration of identity but have an awareness of one’s ethnicity. This awareness could be either positive or negative. In the third stage, moratorium, individuals begin to explore their ethnicity but may be confused about the meaning of it. Finally, in the fourth stage, achieved, individuals freely explore their ethnicity with a clear understanding and acceptance of one’s own ethnicity.

In her research, Phinney acknowledges differences in the ethnic identity development experience across groups. For example, Phinney found that the Asian American students, more than any other ethnic group, had the most negative attitudes about their ethnicity. In the later study on college students, Phinney and Alipuria (1990) found additional between-group differences. Phinney and Alipuria concluded that Asian American college students were less likely to explore the meaning behind ethnic identity, and had lower self-esteem scores than their Black or Hispanic counterparts. These findings have implications for Asian American GLB students, as their confusion about their ethnic identity could impact their formation of their sexual orientation.

Like Kim (1981a; 1981b), Phinney (1989) based her work on Erikson’s theories, stating that Erikson “provides a useful starting point for understanding ethnic identity in adolescence” (Phinney, 1989, p. 35). Phinney also conducted her research under the assumption that ethnic minorities experience identity conflict and that resolution of that conflict leads to an integrated identity. Phinney’s findings and final theory includes the initiation (Diffusion, Foreclosed), process (Moratorium) and resolution (Achieved) of that conflict.
While Phinney’s work is useful in framing ethnic identity development across different groups, Phinney fails to fully consider other identity traits that are evolving and changing concurrently. For example, the reason that individuals could be in the diffusion stage is that they are exploring other aspects of their identity (e.g., religious or sexual identity) and are not ready to explore or discover a connection to their ethnic heritage. Phinney also assumes that ethnic identity has an “achieved” state, meaning that individuals have a complete understanding of one’s ethnicity. This point of view does not consider the changing importance that individuals may place on ethnicity over the life span.

Studies on the Asian/American College Student Experience

Much of the research on Asian/American identity development either builds upon or references the work of both Phinney (1989) and Kim (1981a; 1981b). These studies largely focus on specific types of Asian/Americans, whether it be college students or specific ethnic subgroups. Much of the research on the Asian/American college student experience centers on how these students form opinions about themselves, others, and their environment. Kawaguchi (2003) qualitatively investigated Asian American college student “ethnic identity development in relation to their overall educational experience” (p. 15). Kawaguchi discovered which variables within the college environment influence the identity development of Asian American college students. These variables included experiences with discrimination and prejudice and managing the model minority myth. Kawaguchi based his work on Phinney’s concept of ethnic identity. Kawaguchi also adapted Weidman’s undergraduate socialization model (as cited in Kawaguchi, 2003) to explain how students are socialized into the college environment. After interviewing 15
Asian American college students, Kawaguchi concluded that the Asian American students have negative experiences on campus and struggle to define themselves outside of the model minority myth. He concluded that students could be categorized into each of Phinney’s ethnic identity development stages with most of the students at the Achieved stage.

Alvarez and Helms (2001), in their project on Asian American college students, did not use Phinney’s theory as a framework because they thought that Phinney did not fully consider issues such as racism and oppression. Instead, they used Helm’s (as cited in Alvarez & Helms, 2001) work on White and Black identity development. The purpose of their work was to study racial adjustment in Asian American college students. Alvarez and Helms surveyed 188 Asian American college students and conducted a quantitative analysis. They found that Asian American students at higher stages of identity development had higher levels of self-esteem and increased awareness of intrapersonal and institutional racism.

Theoretical Studies on Asian/American Students

These studies illustrate how Asian/American identity development theories can be a useful starting point toward understanding fully how Asian/American students change and grow during college. Besides these empirical studies on Asian/American students, other studies on Asian/American students are theoretical expansions of current work. Kodama et al. (2001) “present a theoretical investigation of the appropriateness of applying current psychosocial student development theory to Asian Pacific American college students” (p. 412). The researchers conducted an extensive, in-depth literature review to determine if Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) Seven Vector Theory of Student
Development could be applied to the Asian American student population. They concluded that Asian American students experience many of the same vectors described by Chickering and Reisser but that the tasks associated with moving forward within each vector were not the same. For example, one of Chickering and Reisser’s vectors is managing emotions. Kodama et al. concluded that instead of learning to manage “unruly” emotions, Asian American students learn to explore or understand their emotions.

Ibrahim, Ohnishi, and Sandhu (1997) conducted a different type of theoretical analysis and discussed the applicability of identity development theory for South Asian/Americans (i.e., Indian and Pakistani Americans). The authors integrated sociopolitical history, cultural traditions, and gender roles into Phinney and Helms’ work, and discussed the implications within a counseling realm. Unfortunately, Kodama et al.’s (2001) study intentionally excluded Asian nationals (i.e., people from Asia living in the U.S. for work or to study). Considering the unique challenges Asian nationals face, their exclusion from and lack of research on their experiences limits of the applicability of any conclusions or results.

A limitation to these empirical and theoretical studies is that they take a life span development approach to identity development and ultimately draw similar conclusions about the process of Asian/American identity formation. All of these reviewed studies take an essentialist stance and assume that Asian/Americans experience an identity conflict that needs to be resolved, with the difference between these projects being the specific population being studied or the aspect of identity conflict being explored. This lifespan development framework has several limitations, thus leaving many possibilities for future study.
Limitations to Research on Asian/American Students

By utilizing a life span development approach to studies of Asian/American identity development, the researchers assume that identity formation is hierarchical and sequential and also evolves over time. This approach does not fully consider the impact of multiple environmental factors and individual differences in the identity formation process. As a result, these studies do little to debunk the model minority myth, as they assume that the students ultimately achieve an evolved identity and a higher degree of relative success.

In addition, the heterogeneity of the Asian/American population is a consideration that limits the applicability of the results in the previously reviewed works. Students could identify with any number of countries of origin, have different language abilities, generational statuses, and come from different parts of the United States. In addition, while more likely to be concentrated within certain fields, Asian/American students could come from a variety of majors. In spite of this diversity, much of the research on Asian/Americans is focused on drawing conclusions about their experience as a collective (see Kim, 2001; Ng et al., 2007; Ying et al., 2001). This perception of homogeneity causes others to have misperceptions that ultimately impact the educational experience for Asian/American students (Rhoads et al., 2002). College administrators who want to address the needs of their Asian/American students should consider the group’s diversity and heterogeneity. One aspect of that heterogeneity is sexual orientation. The following chapter explores the current state of research on gay, lesbian, and bisexual college students. After this literature review, I discuss the applicability of
both Asian/American and gay, lesbian, and bisexual college student research on the
Asian/American GLB college student population.
Chapter 3: Sexuality and Intersections with Ethnicity

Introduction: The Good Homosexual and the Dangerous Queer

GLB people need to manage the standards placed on them by the heterosexual majority. Smith (1994) refers to them as these standards as being the “good homosexual” instead of the “dangerous queer.” The good homosexual is law-abiding, expresses his/her sexuality privately, and stays in monogamous relationships. On the other hand, the dangerous queer is the invader, seducer, monster, and predator; in other words, the dangerous queer creates social chaos within society. The myth of the dangerous queer is what keeps the GLB population at the margins of society and contributes to creating their status as the sexual “other.”

In a similar vein, GLB students, including ethnic minority GLB students, are expected to be good homosexuals and not threaten the heterosexual majority. Ethnic minority GLB individuals are pressured to not acknowledge the cultural influences on their sexual identity (Grov et al., 2006; Rasmussen, 2004). These expectation to be a good homosexual is particularly complicated for Asian/American students, as they are already expected to be the “model minority” and not disrupt the hegemonic norm.

The pressure from others to be to a “good homosexual” can make individuals uncomfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to others. They may feel that by revealing their sexual orientation, others may see them as a “dangerous queer” and ostracize them from their immediate social circles. While I will not explicitly discuss the
students’ understanding of their expectations of being a “good homosexual,” in this study, I will further explore the students’ perceptions of society’s stance on GLB identity and the impact this perception has on their disclosure process.

Impact of Coming Out

The process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation, or “coming out” is seen as a process rather than a singular event (Evans & Broido, 1999; Rasmussen, 2004). The process involves personally coming to terms with one’s sexual orientation and then disclosing this sexual orientation to friends, family, and the general public (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001; Tamashiro, 2007). Coming out has a powerful impact on an individual during adolescence and the early college years; these youth are often exploring all aspects of their personal identity, including but not limited to gender roles, vocational choices, religious and political beliefs, and ethnicity (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001). By recognizing that their sexual desires are not heterosexual, these youth need to figure out how they fit into the majority, heterosexual culture. They actively seek out information and support. The process is not simple, as they may experience psychological distress along the way (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001).

GLB youth have a higher risk of developing psychological problems because within the adult life span, they are at a crucial junction in forming personal and social identities (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978) and often lack the coping mechanisms needed to manage any identity conflict (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001). More specifically, they experience conflict between their non-normative sexual orientation and the expectations of the majority (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001). They have increased stress and are at a higher risk for mental health
and substance use disorders; these disorders can be attributed to the anti-gay sentiment that they often face (Cochran, Greer Sullivan, & Mays, 2003; Cochran, Mays, Alegria, Ortega, & Takeuchi, 2007). For many traditional-aged GLB college students, the transition to the college environment can create additional stress that further increases their chance of experiencing psychological problems.

While this research shows that a GLB identity can lead to an individual experiencing psychological and mental health problems, there is an essentialist assumption within the current research. The researchers assume that by coming to terms of one’s sexual identity and being open about one’s sexual orientation, GLB individuals can resolve their psychological problems. In the following sections, I outline some of the major GLB identity development theories and further discuss the limitations that these theories have.

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development Theories

Theories about GLB identity development began to emerge during the 1970s (Stevens, 2004). In particular, Cass’ Theory of Homosexual Identity Development and D’Augelli’s Model of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development have frequently been sited in higher education (Stevens, 2004). In the following sections, I explain these theories in greater detail, including the limitations to these works.

Cass’ Theory of Homosexual Identity Development

In many ways, studies on gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) student development are subject to the same type of criticism as other research on student identity development. For example, developed in the seventies, Cass’ Theory of Homosexual Identity Development (1979; 1984) has remained “the most frequently cited theory of

Cass’ model is based on several assumptions that take a constructivist – developmental approach, which suggests that identity development follows a “linear trajectory of increasingly complex meaning-making structures, which are sets of assumptions that determine how an individual perceives and organizes life experiences” (Keagan, as cited in Abes & Kasch, 2007, pp. 619-620). One way in which Cass utilizes this approach is by introducing the Interpersonal Congruency Theory. The theory is based on the idea that complex relationships exist between individuals’ self-concept, behavior, and perception of others. Conflicts between these three occur when individuals’ perceptions about their sexuality changes. When these perceptions change, individuals work to modify one of the three dimensions in order to minimize or eliminate the conflict.

The Interpersonal Congruency Theory is important because Cass (1979) uses it to justify why and how a gay person moves through the different stages of identity development. For example, a male in the Identity Confusion stage is just being introduced to the possibility that his behavior would be homosexual. He sees that there is incongruence between his behavior and self-concept (as heterosexual). One way that he can reduce the conflict is to change his behavior and avoid situations where he might act
out his homosexuality. A conflict could also exist between his behavior and how others perceive him (i.e., the social network believes that he is heterosexual). In this case, changing his behavior would also eliminate this conflict. If, through this process, the man remains open to the fact that he may be gay, he then moves on to the next stage, Identity Comparison. In addition, Cass makes the distinction between the public (social) and private (personal) identity and states that a person can have a private identity that is homosexual while having a public one that is heterosexual. As that person progresses through identity formation, the public and private identities are integrated into a unified homosexual identity (Cass, 1979).

Cass (1979; 1984) does not mention bisexuality in her work. Overall, she fails to consider the possibilities regarding sexual orientation beyond being gay or lesbian and essentializes gay and lesbian identity into one process. Cass (1984) writes, “Almost uniformly, identity formation is conceptualized as a developmental process marked by a series of changes, growth points, or stages along which certain experiences can be ordered” (pp. 145-146). Cass assumes that gay and lesbian identity development occurs in a similar fashion and does not fully consider the impact different life changes can have on the process.

**D’Augelli’s Model of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Identity Development**

While several other theories of GLB identity development exist (e.g., see Coleman, 1982; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Troiden, 1989), many of these are similar in structure to Cass’ work. D’Augelli (1994a) attempts to address some of Cass’ limitations in his work on GLB identity development. D’Augelli proposes that identity development is a fluid process and not a linear one, as Cass (1979; 1984) suggests. D’Augelli identifies
six processes involved in GLB identity development. These are (1) Exiting heterosexual identity, (2) Developing a personal lesbian / gay / bisexual identity status, (3) Developing a lesbian / gay / bisexual social identity, (4) Becoming a lesbian / gay / bisexual offspring, (5) Developing a lesbian / gay / bisexual intimacy status, and (6) Entering a lesbian / gay / bisexual community.

Within D’Augelli’s model, individuals go from recognizing that they are not heterosexual while telling others that they are GLB to developing relationships with both heterosexual and GLB individuals to finally becoming a GLB political and social advocate. Unlike Cass (1979), D’Augelli does not assume that this formation of GLB occurs in a strictly linear fashion. Individuals may “experience development in one process to a greater extent than another” (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p. 29). For example, a gay man could have a strong sense of gay identity and a romantic partner but have not disclosed his sexual orientation to his family.

One of the most significant assumptions that D’Augelli makes is that GLB identity development is a lifelong process and that a healthy GLB identity is possible but not the endpoint of that process (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). D’Augelli assumes that no person experiences GLB identity development in the same way; the theory takes into consideration the individual differences in identity formation. Secondly, D’Augelli stresses the importance of developmental plasticity in his theory. He assumes that “human functioning is highly responsive to environmental circumstances and to changes induced by physical and other biological factors” (D’Augelli, 1994a, p. 320). In terms of sexual orientation, this plasticity means that sexual orientation is more fluid during certain point of the life span and more “crystallized at others” (D’Augelli, 1994a, p. 320).
Unlike Cass (1979), D’Augelli acknowledges that the formation of a sexual identity as only part of the greater life span, and believes that the context in which sexual identity develops has to be considered. This context includes factors such as age, relationships, and social circumstances, and determines which of the six processes are significant at any particular point in life.

While acknowledging these individual differences takes a more holistic and multi-layered perspective than the Cass’ (1979) universal point of view, D’Augelli’s theory is difficult to test empirically, a fact that the researcher himself acknowledges (D'Augelli, 1994b). Empirically testing the theory would require a longitudinal study of subjects across the lifespan. Thus, while the theory acknowledges individual differences in forming a GLB identity, without the empirical research to fully support the claims, it is difficult to determine exactly what those differences are and the impact different factors such as age, social circumstances, and personal relationships may have. In addition, while the theory does take individual differences into consideration, D’Augelli does little to conceptualize and fully explain those individual differences within his work. In this study, I attempt to identify some of these individual differences and go beyond having GLB individuals fit neatly into a specific theory.

Developmental Studies on GLB College Students

Studies on the GLB college student population and their identity development can be largely categorized into two different types. One consists of the developmental studies examining specific aspects of the identity formation process, such as coming out. The other are studies that examine the campus climate toward the GLB (and often transsexual) population. These climate studies are significant because many
developmental theorists base their work on the assumption that the environment and its
general climate impacts identity formation.

Many studies on the identity development of the GLB campus population examine the “milestone event” in identity development, i.e., coming out, (Cain, 1991). Evans and Broido (1999) conducted a qualitative study examining the experience of GLB students coming out in the residence halls. Utilizing a constructivist framework, the researchers interviewed 20 GLB college students and identified 10 common themes in the coming out process within the residence halls. As Evans and Broido describe,

These themes related to the coming-out process itself, how students negotiated and made meaning of it, factors that positively or negatively influenced students to come out, the advantages and disadvantages of being out, and the reactions of others to the students’ disclosure of their sexual orientation. (p.662)

All of these themes reflect, at least in part, the identity development process for GLB students. In coming to terms with their sexual identity, the researchers concluded that students need to decide the risks and benefits of coming out and learn to make meaning of the entire process.

Rassmussen (2004) conducted a theoretical analysis, reviewing the literature concerning coming out within educational settings. Rassmussen cautions against privileging the coming out process and acknowledges that educators should consider the possibility that disclosing one’s sexual orientation may not be possible for some individuals due to factors such as cultural differences. Cain (1991), in interviewing 38 gay men, elaborated further on the coming out process, developing different theories as to why an individual may chose to disclose or conceal his sexual orientation. Cain also
acknowledged that coming out has different meanings for individuals and that cultural factors can impact that meaning.

These studies draw upon the work of the GLB developmental theorists who acknowledge disclosure as part of the process (Cass, 1979, 1984; D’Augelli, 1994a). However, the developmental theorists also assume that disclosure happens in a specific way. For example, according to Cass, in the Identity Pride stage, individuals have fully disclosed their sexual orientation and focus on activism. In this case, Cass assumes that individuals are able to fully disclose their sexual orientation to others and would want to become activists. Cass fails to consider that factors, such as culture and ethnicity, could influence the disclosure process. Therefore, as defined, many individuals could never fully complete and go through this stage. Researchers studying the disclosure process are only beginning to acknowledge these cultural factors. This study examines cultural factors further by specifically investigating how Asian/American GLB students disclose their sexual orientation to others.

GLB Campus Climate Studies

Research has shown that GLB and transsexual students (GLBT) often navigate a heterosexist environment (Evans, 2000, 2001; Evans & Broido, 1999; Rankin, 2003). In these studies, a majority of the GLBT campus population (including students, faculty, and staff) felt that their campus was a source of harassment. Many of the surveys assessing campus climate examine both the GLBT population’s personal experiences and their perceptions of prejudice on their respective campuses (Rankin, 2003). In these surveys, individuals reported both high levels of perceived, lived discrimination. These incidents of perceived, lived discrimination can significantly impair GLB students’
ability to learn and contributes to the psychological distress they often experience (Brown et al., 2004; Evans, 2000; Evans & Herriott, 2004; Rankin, 2003).

Rankin (2003) conducted a multi-institutional campus climate study to determine the major factors contributing to a negative climate for GLBT individuals. The survey was administered to self-identified GLBT individuals. Based on those findings, she made several recommendations for improving the campus climate, including implementing measures to recruit and retaining GLBT individuals, integrating GLBT issues into the curriculum, demonstrating institutional commitment to GLBT issues, providing a safe place for dialogue, and providing educational programming on these issues. Brown et al. (2004) conducted a campus climate assessment for a single campus using a multi-dimensional approach, surveying both self-identified GLBT and presumably non-GLBT students, faculty, staff. These researchers found that perceptions about the campus climate varied across groups, with those not part of the GLBT community perceiving a more positive climate than those within it. They suggested that initiatives, including the ones recommended by Rankin, should be targeted, with content designed with the group’s knowledge level on GLBT issues in mind.

Homophobia and heterosexism is well documented on college campuses (Evans, 2001). Expectations and stereotypes imposed on GLB students by the heterosexual majority make the college environment stressful for them. The challenge for these students is to find small pockets within a hostile environment that allow for safe exploration of their sexual orientation. Asian/American GLB students are even further limited in opportunities to find safe communities because of their ethnicity. The intersection of identity traits, including ethnicity, complicates the college experience for
Asian/American GLB individuals and creates additional challenges as they work toward achieving their education.

Intersections of Identity

One of the main reasons Asian/American students have difficulty adjusting to the college environment is the majority’s perception of group homogeneity versus the actual heterogeneity. This heterogeneity is further complicated when considering other aspects of identity, such as sexual orientation. The following section analyzes the research on one particular subgroup, i.e., Asian/American gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) college students. First, models pertaining to the development of multiple aspects of identity are reviewed. Then, I discuss research using these models as they pertain to the Asian/American GLB student experience.

Many of the previously mentioned studies on Asian/American and GLB student identity development acknowledge the need for additional research on the impact of multiple identity traits on the identity formation process (e.g., Brown et al., 2004; Cain, 1991; Fingerhut, Peplau, & Ghavami, 2005; Kodama et al., 2001; Kodama, McEwen, Liang, & Lee, 2002; Rasmussen, 2004). With that need in mind, Reynolds and Pope (1991) developed the Multidimensional Identity Model (MIM). With the MIM, the researchers wanted to address identity development for individuals with multiple marginalized identity traits.

Jones and McEwen (2000) expanded on the MIM to create the Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (MMDI). The MMDI addresses all aspects of identity and not just marginalized ones. Jones and McEwen also acknowledged the faults in models that address identity development in a linear, stage-like fashion. They distinguished personal
identity traits (i.e., the inner sense of self) from social ones (i.e., traits externally defined by others). These personal traits form the core of identity; the social characteristics, such as race and sexual orientation, revolve around the core. These social traits have different levels of salience, depending on the context at any particular point in an individual’s life (Jones & McEwen, 2000). For example, two Asian/American lesbian college students could have different conceptions of identity depending on contextual factors such as family background or current choice of college. One may more closely identify with her sexual orientation and another may closely identify with her Asian/American heritage. By considering these types of factors influencing identity development, the MMDI can be considered a multifaceted, multidimensional model of the identity formation.

Additional research has used these models as part of their theoretical framework (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Stevens, 2004). For example, Stevens (2004) integrated D’Augelli’s process oriented perspective with the holistic framework of the MIM and MMDI to develop a framework for understanding gay identity development that also considers different identity traits. Abes worked with several researchers to explore how lesbian college students’ meaning-making skills contributed to their understanding of the multiple aspects of their identity (Abes & Jones, 2004). Abes later expanded upon the 2004 study and adapted the MMDI to include meaning making (Abes et al., 2007).

Asian/American GLB College Students

The Asian/American GLB population is one group in which these models of intersectionality can be applied. However, to date, there has been limited research done on the experiences of Asian/American GLB students and their identity formation process,
and what limited research that has been done has several limitations. For example, Hahm and Adkins (2009) theoretically construct a model of identity formation for Asian Pacific Islander adolescents. They propose an identity development theory that adapts Troiden’s (1989) theory of gay identity development and integrates it with Berry’s acculturation model (as cited in Hahm & Adkins, 2009). However, like many of the Asian/American and GLB identity developmental theories, the API Sexual Minority Acculturation Model explains the process in stages and utilizes psychosocial theoretical assumptions.

One study of Latino and Asian American GLB students found that they have a slightly higher risk of having psychological problems, such as suicide or depression (Cochran et al., 2007). However, the researchers themselves in this study admit to some methodological problems, such as a specific, constraining definition of sexual identity, that make the validity of the conclusions questionable at best. Another study found that Asian American and Pacific Islander sexual minorities have greater incidents of substance abuse, including drinking, smoking, and drug use (Hahm, Wong, Huang, Ozonoff, & Lee, 2008). Like Cochran et al., Hahm et al. (2008) also admit to methodological limitations but acknowledge that the lack of general research on the topics make their work a valuable contribution to the field.

Besides these projects, other studies (e.g., Clark, 2005) serve as “awareness” pieces, providing information that makes the general population aware of the issues facing GLB persons of color. One survey studied Asian American gay men and their experience in adolescence (Kumashiro, 1999). This analysis demonstrated that the subjects experienced oppression on many different levels. These multiple points of oppression made it difficult for Asian American gay male adolescents to find support
from either community (Kumashiro, 1999). However, this survey utilized only three subjects that were interviewed as adults and asked to reflect on the adolescent experience; little can be inferred from such a small sample size and from subjects who are asked to recall events that occurred many years ago. While these types of studies provide valuable insight into the Asian/American GLB experience, to date, there have not been significant, comprehensive studies examining the issues for college students of color, especially Asian/Americans who also identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

While little work has been done on college students, more work has been done on the experience of Asian/American GLB individuals as a collective. Chung and Katayama (1998) point out that ethnic and GLB identity development both involve (a) acceptance of one’s cultural heritage or sexual orientation, (b) understanding of heterosexism / racism and discrimination, and (c) integrating one’s ethnic identity or sexual orientation with other identities. While these processes may parallel each other, the studies that have been done on the Asian/American GLB population have actually focused on the conflict between the two processes (Chan, 1989), and on the intersections between the two (Greene, 1994). Asian/Americans are often afraid to disclose their sexual orientation to their family because of the importance of family roles within many Asian/American cultures (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000). Homosexuality is seen as unacceptable because it is considered a rejection of these traditional Asian/American family and gender roles. The continuation of family through marriage and childrearing is highly valued within Asian/American cultures; homosexuality represents the inability to follow through and achieve that goal (Chan, 1989, 1992).
Besides facing rejection from the Asian/American community because of their sexual orientation, they also face the potential for rejection and marginalization from the GLB community because of their Asian/American status (Chan, 1989; Wooden, Kawasaki, & Mayeda, 1983). This potential for discrimination often creates additional stressors (including feelings of isolation, estrangement, and psychological vulnerability) for these individuals (Greene, 1994). These emotions can negatively impact their college experiences and impair their ability to achieve their educational outcomes.

Some studies indicate that the experience of Asian/American GLB people may vary according to gender (Chan, 1989; Leong, 1996). Asian/American lesbians experience the potential for gender discrimination in addition to discrimination based on sexual orientation and ethnicity. This discrimination is based in the ‘passive but exotic’ stereotype of Asian/American women (Chan, 1989; Leong, 1996). This gendered stereotype can be so strong that it overshadows any stereotypes based on sexual orientation (Chan, 1989). This gender stereotype gives Asian/American lesbians a triple minority status, one that includes ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender (Chan, 1989). Managing these stereotypes in a positive way is a challenge that these women must address.

The lack of support networks can make the college experience difficult for Asian/American GLB students, especially for those on predominantly White campuses. One of the reasons non-White GLB students have difficulty navigating the campus environment is the use of language. Historically, terms used to describe GLB individuals were developed by White persons, making it difficult to effectively engage and unite GLB students of color (Poynter & Washington, 2005). For example, an Asian/American
GLB student may not feel comfortable at a GLB student organization meeting when the majority at the meeting are White students who are using White terminology when discussing their sexuality. This language serves to ostracize them from the rest of the group and makes it difficult to find a comfortable support network.

Besides the difficulty finding acceptance within the White, heterosexual, and GLB communities, sexual orientation and homosexual behavior is silenced within Asian/American circles (Chan, 1989; Hom, 1994). Within many Asian/American communities, language that promotes positive identification with one’s sexual orientation is not used. This dynamic creates a barrier for Asian/American GLB students in their quest to achieve a self-identity that integrates both their ethnicity and sexual orientation. They are unable to find unconditional support from the Asian/American or predominantly White GLB communities (Wooden et al., 1983), thus leaving them outside of both the dominant and minority groups.

Ethnic minority GLB students face many challenges that impede their ability to achieve their educational outcomes, including discrimination, oppression, choosing between cultures, rejection, and social support (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000). These experiences make it difficult for them to fully assimilate into any culture, ultimately creating pressure for them to choose one (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000). They can be rejected by any or all of these communities, thus “leaving them with limited social support, few resources, and a lack of role models to assist them in negotiating the complex process of identity development” (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000, p. 282).

Overall, very little work has been done on Asian/American GLB students and their identity formation process. The studies that have been done on Asian/American
GLB individuals are either theoretical, involving a compilation of all previously conducted literature (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000; Chung & Katayama, 1998; Hahm & Adkins, 2009), have been done with either very few empirical subjects (Badrudoja, 2006; Clark, 2005; Hahm et al., 2008; Kumashiro, 1999), with subjects from particular geographic backgrounds (Badrudoja, 2006; Sohng & Icard, 1996; Wooden et al., 1983), or are comparative studies with other ethnic minority GLB individuals (Cochran et al., 2007). These studies utilize a variety of theoretical frameworks. Some researchers build upon the work of developmental theorists (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000; Chan, 1989; Chung & Katayama, 1998; Hahm & Adkins, 2009; Wooden et al., 1983). These studies use developmental theory as a foundation to help them describe how identity formation occurs in individuals and the impact of different social identity traits on that development (Chan, 1989; Rosario et al., 2004; Wooden et al., 1983). Other research studies are simply descriptive in nature. The researchers do not draw upon any theoretical framework; they simply seek to explain the Asian/American GLB experience by interviewing a single individual (Clark, 2005; Sohng & Icard, 1996). Finally, others have sought to develop a more integrated understanding of Asian/American GLB identity, utilizing queer theory or poststructuralism to draw their conclusions (Badrudoja, 2006; Kumashiro, 1999). To note, Badrudoja’s and Kumashiro’s studies utilized two and three research subjects respectively, leaving much room for expansion of their work.

These studies show that a complex relationship between multiple aspects of identity exist for Asian/American GLB individuals. Numerous expectations are placed on them by the Asian/American, GLB, and White, heterosexual communities. All three of these membership groups maintain certain stereotypes about Asian/American GLB
individuals that these people have to manage. In turn, these expectations cause psychological distress that impair or delay the formation of a healthy, positive identity (Cochran et al., 2007; Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Greene, 1994; Rosario et al., 2004).

For Asian/American GLB students, the pressure to meet expectations and fear of rejection by the different communities have several implications in terms of their college experience. By concealing their sexual orientation, Asian/American GLB students can appear to adhere to the gender and family roles valued culturally, thus maintaining their connection to family members, especially their parents. When Asian/American GLB persons do reveal their sexual orientation, they most often disclose to a sibling, who is more likely to be accepting of non-traditional gender and family roles (Chan, 1989; Wooden et al., 1983). However, the pressure to remain “in the closet” can be psychologically detrimental to these students and affect their ability to be successful (Cochran et al., 2007). In addition, Asian/American GLB students face the possibly of rejection from the GLB community because of their ethnicity. They are challenged to deal with the stereotypes regarding Asian/American sexuality, especially those stereotypes created by media (Leong, 1996; Poon & Ho, 2008; Shimizu, 2007). These stereotypes contribute to individuals experiencing discrimination from the GLB community (Chan, 1989; Wooden et al., 1983). Finally, Asian/American GLB students have to manage ethnic stereotypes from the greater White, heterosexual community. They feel that they should conform to the model minority myth, and feel pressured to live up to the expectations established by the dominant group (Lee, 1996).

These pressures contribute to creating a system of advanced marginalization (Cohen, 1999), where marginalized group members who adhere to the dominant
discourse are rewarded by the majority. With advanced marginalization, those marginalized do not experience discrimination overtly. The rhetoric is one where the dominant, privileged majority does not feel that they are acting against those in the minority, but rather minority members who do not adhere to hegemonic standards are to blame for their situation. Advanced marginalization is especially salient for persons with multiple points of marginality as they may feel pressure to act a specific way by members of multiple social groups.

In summary, the current body of research on Asian/American GLB individuals reveals that these individuals experience pressure and stressors from the Asian/American, GLB, and White, heterosexist communities. For this study, I propose using Foucault’s major concepts in order to more fully understand the impact of these stressors. In the next chapter, I explore these Foucauldian concepts in greater detail and discuss how they are integrated into the study.
Chapter 4: Foucault’s Integration into the Study

Theoretical Perspective

Many scholars divide Foucault’s work into two periods (Miller, 2008). The first period encompasses his earliest work until the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (1977a) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978). These early works focus on disciplinary power and its impact on the subject. Works after that period until his death focus on governmentality and ethics. These periods represent a shifting emphasis in Foucault’s work that occurred over time (Miller, 2008). For purposes of this study, I will be focusing primarily on Foucault’s earlier works.

Michel Foucault’s (1970; 1977a; 1977b; 1978) ideas about the subject, discourse, power, knowledge, and regimes of truth are based in the poststructural idea that there is no absolute truth, and no one specific way a person can view the world. As Wolf (2009) states, poststructuralists “argue that objective knowledge is an illusion because what we call ‘truth’ or ‘knowledge’ is only particular to our culture and the language or ‘discourse’ that comes down to us from those positions of power” (p. 169). A departure from the constructivist-developmental theorists, Foucault saw the “individual experience as socially generated out of collective public experience” (Olssen, 2003, p. 195). In particular, Foucault’s focus on power as a way of creating the material makes him unique from other poststructural theorists such as Derrida, Lyotard, and Baudrillard (Olssen,
Foucault was concerned with how power created relationships and controlled bodies, and the power that bodies have over others.

Foucault’s work serves to conceptualize the key ideas in this study and is a departure from previous developmentally focused research. The following sections detail some of Foucault’s key concepts and their relationship to higher education. In addition, these concepts help to formulate and define the key terms within this study, including Asian/American, identity, coming out, and GLB.

**Discourse and Discursive Formation**

One of the central concepts in Foucault’s work is his theory of discourse and discursive formation. Discourse can be defined as “a body of ideas, concepts and beliefs that have become established as knowledge, or as an accepted way of looking at the world” (Doherty, 2007, p. 193). People view their world through a particular discourse. Discourse has two primary purposes. Discourse helps to shape and create an environment through the action of its subjects, but discourse is also a social construction that is largely dependent upon the environment in which it is formed.

Higher education can be considered a particular type of discourse. In this case, the college environment is its own “system,” with a set of rules, language, and people (i.e., students, faculty, staff / administrators). Higher education seeks to educate its students in a way that allows them to form a particular way of thinking and viewing the world. For example, college courses and major programs of study are laid out with a specific set of learning outcomes in mind. Beyond the classroom, the same type of intentionality can be seen in areas such as university housing. The development and rapid expansion of living learning programs reflects an effort by university administrators to design a social
environment (i.e., residence hall) which allows residents to develop and learn in a particular way. To be successful, students learn to navigate all aspects of this system and learn how to operate and function within this discursive formation.

Foucault considers language to be one key tool to communicating the key points of discourse to others. Language helps to communicate the different nuances of a discourse and ultimately contributes to establishing the power dynamics within a particular setting. Professors use the language within syllabi, papers, and exams to establish the classroom discourse and exert their power over their students. Colleges each have their own terminology to help its members navigate the environment. For example, generally, each campus has a unique name for the online registration system. Unless one is a member of the campus, he or she is unlikely to know or understand the term, and hence unlikely to be familiar with that particular campus discourse.

Based on previous research, Asian/American GLB students have to learn the language and practice of many different discourses, including but not limited to the Asian/American, GLB, and White, heterosexual community discourses. The expectations within each discourse are different, thus making it difficult for Asian/American GLB students to successfully navigate them all. Since the language used is unique to each discourse, those already familiar with it are in a privileged position. Poynter and Washington (2005) point out that terms used to affirm gay, lesbian, and bisexual behavior are culturally biased toward the White community. For example, an Asian/American gay student may have never heard the term “queer” being used to affirm one’s sexual identity and may feel uncomfortable attending a GLB student organization meeting where the students use the terminology. Unless students at the meeting are willing to help this
student learn and become familiar with the language, he is likely to feel uncomfortable interacting within the group.

One way to explain the Asian/American GLB college student experience is through a discursive lens. For example, higher education discourse can privilege heterosexual individuals and ostracize sexual minorities (Epstein, O'Flynn, & Telford, 2003). For example, many professors do not fully incorporate GLB issues into their curriculum or pedagogy. If they do, these issues are often an “add on” to the course, disregarded, and deemed less important (Epstein et al., 2003). This classroom discourse may make GLB students hesitant to disclose their sexual orientation to their professors.

Since Asian/American GLB students have to manage expectations associated with their sexual identity along with their ethnic identity, the exact way in which the discourse of higher education impacts the sexual identity disclosure process is not known.

*Power and Knowledge*

Foucault’s concept of power is key to understanding the effect of discourse on an individual. Power is a strategy created from discourse and occurs when one person or group has control over another (Foucault, 1977a). For Foucault, power has many different functions. One is the fact that power is “exercised” over subjects. Power is seen as a way of maintaining control and implementing a system of discipline. Within higher education, power is integrated in different ways. For example, in the classroom, professors exert power over their subjects, in this case students. Students consider the professor to be the source of knowledge and learning. Because of the status that they are given by their students, professors can utilize power as a way of controlling the overall group.
Beyond the controlling nature of power, power also has the ability to build and establish relationships. When power is exerted over different subjects (e.g., teacher-student; mother-child) a relationship is produced and established. For example, a professor’s duties are defined in relationship to the student. The professor’s role is to educate students through coursework, advising, and research. Without the student, the professor’s role would not exist. Professors also have relationships with university administration. University administration has the expectation that professors will conduct research and advance the knowledge base within their respective fields. These expectations are tied to promotion and tenure. Foucauldian power can be used to both establish, control, and break down relationships. The college professor cannot exist without the university, its administration and its students. At the same time, the professor can exert control over the students and the administration can exert control over professors. At any point, these relationships can break down, causing the power structure to break down with it. If these power regimes break down, then the subjects as we know it would cease to exist.

Power does not exist solely in hierarchical relationships but also in more linear ones, such as peer relationships that form while students are in college. Power can exist in this way because of its relationship to discourse and knowledge (Williams, 1999). “Discourse does not exist separately from power, that is, power lies in discourse” (Williams, 1999, p. 95). Power cannot be applied without discursive practices. In other words, the concepts, ideas, and knowledge that make up a discourse cannot fully thrive without power; power cannot exist without that discourse. Students learn about these discursive practices in order to know the expectations placed upon them. Without power,
higher education discourse would not exist, and the interrelationships between language, culture, society, and individuals would not be possible (Williams, 1999). Therefore, the relationship between discourse and power, and the role of that relationship in forming peer groups illustrates the relevance of power to any type of discourse analysis (Williams, 1999).

Another key point that Foucault makes in his early work is the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault (1977a) describes the relationship between power and knowledge as the following,

Power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault, 1977a, p. 27).

Knowledge and power can not exist without each other. Science is an example of this power / knowledge relationship at work. Technologies developed from science give the researchers power over their human subjects. For example, Foucault (1978) sites sexual and reproductive technologies, such as birth control and C-sections, as a way for those in the medical field to exert control over their subjects. In these cases, the knowledge gives those in the medical field power over their patients and allows them to dictate how reproduction occurs. Thus, science becomes a tool by which people can be controlled. This science and body of knowledge would not exist without the expertise of the researchers and scientists who oversee their development.

When knowledge produced through power pertains to a particular subject, the knowledge controls and dictates their actions. Many think that universities serve as sites
of knowledge production with its primary purpose to produce science (Simons & Masschelein, 2007). Much of this science and research is aimed at controlling people and their bodies, a concept that Foucault (1978) refers to as bio-power. Bio-power has the purpose of “achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault, 1978, p. 140) which ultimately leads to the formation of docile bodies. Within higher education, the introductory, freshmen-level courses are an example of bio-power and docile bodies at work. At larger universities, freshmen-level courses may have 200 or more students enrolled. Professors lecture to the students, with the expectation that the students will not and should not question their judgment or the material. The layout of the classroom, often a large lecture hall with fixed seats, ensures that students remained in their location, making it physically difficult for them to question a professor. All of these factors help create several hundred docile bodies. The students are “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 136); all students in the course are expected to learn the exact same material, with the expectation that they leave the course having the same foundational knowledge. No room exists for students to question the information being presented. Many students believe that adhering to the norms established by bio-power is what distinguishes a “good student” from a unsuccessful one (Llamas, 2006). This prevailing belief shows how power and knowledge can establish these group norms.

Wong (2007) describes the power / knowledge relationship as “what is known about us as objects of knowledge at a particular moment will inform our thinking about ourselves as persons and the possibilities available to us” (p. 73). In other words, knowledge created through power informs the relationships people build with each other.
Asian/American students’ self-identity develops from the relationships they build with others (Kim, 2001). Similarly, GLB students’ ability to develop a fully integrated sexual identity depends on how they perceive others reacting to their GLB status (Cass, 1983; D’Augelli, 1994a; Fassinger & Miller, 1997). In this study, I explain how Asian/American GLB students establish various relationships that lead to disclosure or concealment of their sexual orientation. I also explore how Asian/American GLB students use the knowledge about their sexual orientation to maintain or continue the relationships. Overall, based on what is known about power and knowledge, I uncover how Asian/American GLB students seek out information about their identity and the role that this information has in the building and establishing relationships.

*Regimes of Truth*

Part of meaning making and learning about oneself requires an examination of how people construct truth. For Foucault (1977a), power establishes the truth, and truth is revealed through knowledge and discursive practices, something that individuals often take for granted (Llamas, 2006). In higher education, Foucauldian truth is seen in a variety of ways. Professors conduct and publish research to maintain their status (or move up) within an institutional hierarchy. Students take exams or write papers in order to explain the truth learned from courses. The university environment has power regimes that are structured to produce many different types of truths. One only needs to listen to the many different colloquial terms (e.g., GEC, Blackboard) used on a college campus to learn these truths. These terms are part of the hegemony and are generally accepted as part of the campus culture/discourse.
Because of its multi-dimensional purpose (i.e., teaching, research, service), higher education has a unique place and role within the knowledge community. Truth is revealed to students through courses and participation in research. Faculty members work toward meeting their own research initiatives. In this study, I examine how truth is revealed to Asian/American GLB students as they disclose their sexual orientation to others. In conducting this study, I also reveal a truth about the Asian/American GLB student experience. Overall, the interrelationships between power, discourse, truth, and knowledge provide a useful framework for understanding how Asian/American GLB students come to understand their identity and their role within society.

_Foucault’s Subject and Agency_

Foucault’s concepts of discourse, power, knowledge, and regimes of truth are all predicated on the creation of the subject (Foucault, 1970). For Foucault, people, and hence subjects, are products of discourse, power, and truth. In other words, people are created from the environment in which they have been placed; in turn, subjects contribute to any environment and are thus considered a part of that environmental system (Strange & Banning, 2001). This interrelationship means that students are shaped in some way by the college environment. For this study, I assume that students do not enter into the experience as natural, fixed beings and can be molded in a specific way.

According to Foucault, power does not exist without resistance, thus making resistance by subjects inevitable. As previously noted, higher education consists of many regimes of truth established by power (Llamas, 2006). Unquestioned, these regimes create a hegemony in which resistance by all groups is unavoidable. Higher education can potentially serve to discipline students and force them to adapt to this hegemonic
discourse (Grant, 1997). Asian/American GLB students, by virtue of their social group memberships, are part of a dominant discourse that considers them marginalized. Potentially, these students could be what Foucault calls agents, who exist within the hegemonic, normative discourse but do not define themselves by it (Bevir, 1999). Foucault differentiates agency from autonomy, as he states that the social context prevents individuals from ever achieving complete autonomy (Bevir, 1999; Foucault, 1977a, 1978). For this project, I examine this agency in Asian/American GLB students using this Foucauldian perspective.

Key Concepts for this Study

In this study, Foucault’s major concepts are used to provide new insight into how Asian/American GLB students decide to disclose their sexual orientation; previous research has yet to frame the experience in this way. However, in order to conduct a study with the aforementioned purpose in mind, other key concepts, such as identity, Asian/American, GLB, and coming out needs to be defined using this Foucauldian framework.

Identity

Many of the developmental studies on identity formation use Erikson’s concept of identity (1968); he was one of the first to popularize and operationalize the term (Gleason, 1983). Erikson defines identity formation as

A process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of
judging him the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to the types that have become relevant to him. (pp. 22-23)

Erikson goes on to describe how identity formation depends on the interaction between the person and their social environment, and concludes by describing identity formation as an internal process, deeply dependent on individuals’ perceptions of those interactions. Overall, Erikson views identity formation as “holistic and stable across time” (Deaux, 1993, p. 5).

On the other hand, a Foucauldian definition of identity does not consider identity development stable and linear. Within this framework, identity is defined within the context of the person’s surroundings. Foucault believes that a truly independent and sovereign subject does not exist (Du Gay, 2007; Foucault, 1977a, 1978) and that power is used to define the self (Du Gay, 1996). In other words, a man cannot be defined as a man without considering the relationship to various “others;” these could include women, children, or animals / beasts.

As mentioned earlier, resistance by subjects is inevitable within any Foucauldian discourse. Agency, or the degree to which individuals define themselves outside of the dominant discourse (while existing within it), is also inherent to any discourse. Because of their marginalized social group membership, Asian/American GLB students already exist as “outsiders” within the dominant discourse, and thus already have a certain degree of agency. As they learn more about themselves and their self-identity, the degree to which they enact that agency can and should change, as they can more fully define themselves outside of the hegemonic norms. One way to enact (or not enact) that agency is by revealing or concealing their sexual orientation. Thus, within a Foucauldian
framework, agency is one way to explain the identity formation process. In this study, I more fully explore how students enact their agency and in turn, have a better understanding of themselves as Asian/American GLB individuals.

Asian/American

Participants for this study were both Asian American and Asian international GLB students from different countries of origin. Because of the societal implications of being an ethnic minority, their specific ethnicity is one of many factors that influence both self-perceptions and perceptions by others of sexual identity and sexual orientation. As Shah (2001) states, “Race is better understood as a social and political category that persists because it offers a seemingly ‘natural’ observable difference to explain social inequality and domination” (p. 5). In other words, race (and also ethnicity) is more than just a biological phenomenon; it is a socially defined way to explain difference. This difference also contributes to different perceptions regarding sexuality and sexual orientation. These differences in perceptions about sexual orientation are why studies focusing on the Asian/American GLB student experience is warranted.

The role of racism and ethnic discrimination also has to be considered when conceptualizing the terms Asian/American. By Foucault’s own admission, he did not make race a primary topic in his work. Therefore, Foucault’s references to race and racism are perfunctory, and its meanings are inferred around his discussions about sexuality (Stoler, 1995). Foucault considered race and racism a state concern, one that is intricately connected to bio-power (Stoler, 1995). As a state, racist activity is used to control specific populations and single out those specific populations. Racism thus contributes to creating a set of docile bodies. As Smith (1994) points out, racial
discourses can create considerable governmental power. For example, in Smith’s analysis, Enoch Powell, a British Parliamentarian, used an anti-black immigration rhetoric to gain political advantage within Parliament. Powell convinced British citizens that black immigrants represented a threat to the social order. Powell was never overtly racist in his language. In this case, language helped to create a subtle racial discourse that was used to gain a significant political advantage. This racist discourse becomes the hegemonic norm, making it difficult for those marginalized within it to overcome the challenge. Asian/Americans are defined in part by the language and policies set by the majority. For example, the rhetoric of the Asian/Americans as the model minority has led to their removal from affirmative action policy (Lee, 2006b). Their removal serves to maintain ethnic difference and contributes to defining Asian/Americans as the “other.”

In this project, I deconstruct this rhetoric of difference and seek to explain it in Foucauldian terms. While the Asian/American population within the United States is diverse and heterogeneous, no particular subset was used for this study, as my objective was to better understand how these rhetoric of differences were formed. Discourse and the role of power in forming knowledge and regimes of truth are unique to individuals; they are also interpreted differently by each person. Therefore, while Asian/American students with different backgrounds will be used, I account for individual differences with the data analysis.

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual

Sexual orientation and sexual identity are also individualized and subjective; people may identify with different categories over time (Svab & Kuhar, 2008). Many associate sexual identity with sexual practice. However, a man may sleep with another
man and not identify as gay. A man could also identify as gay without ever having had sex with another man. Therefore, sexual desire should be considered with sexual practice. At times, sexual identity, practice, and desire can be at odds with each other. This conflict makes the idea of having a single, stable sexual identity “confining and inaccurate” (Takagi, 1994, p. 3)

Green (1998) best describes how society and the environment influence the formation of sexual identity by stating

To understand sexual identity effectively, we must consider four things: (a) how the individual views himself or herself (self-identity); (b) how the individual is perceived by others (perceived identity); (c) how the individual presents himself or herself to others (presented identity); and (d) how well these three aspects of identity are integrated in consciousness. (p. 89)

This definition of sexual identity therefore takes the environment and the person’s relationships into consideration.

Heterosexism also influences the formation of sexual identity. The White, heterosexual majority has expectations for what they consider to be the “good” homosexual. Those who behave outside those expectations are considered the “dangerous queer.” The myth of the dangerous queer is what keeps the GLB population at the margins of society and contributes to maintaining their status as the sexual “other.”

How then is the concept of the dangerous queer created? Foucault defines the relationship between sex and power in terms of repression (Foucault, 1978). If sexuality is repressed in our society, than any discussion of it is considered a transgression and is an attempt to undermine the power regime in place. Foucault is concerned about how
power and sexual discourses serve to regulate behavior, making certain sexual behaviors acceptable within our society. Thus, because the dangerous queer does not subscribe to hegemonic views of homosexuality and homosexual behavior, they are considered socially unacceptable and are considered the sexual “other.” As a result, when individuals are in the process of forming a sexual identity, these expectations of the good homosexual and dangerous queer can affect the way in that the identity develops.

Collectively, these factors illustrate that people have multiple pathways to forming a sexual identity and also explain how sexual identity is conceptualized by the individual (Rosario et al., 2008). This study closely examines how disclosure or concealment affects the way that identity is constructed.

**Coming Out**

Many have pointed out how “coming out,” is privileged in Western society (e.g., see Cain, 1991; Grov et al., 2006; Rasmussen, 2004). Many GLB individuals assume that “coming out of the closet” and declaring their minority sexual orientation to others is an act that one is morally obligated to do. Doing so helps that person reach a state of self-actualization and have an improved self-identity (Cass, 1979, 1983; D’Augelli, 1994a; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Coming out is also seen as a way to combat homophobia and heterosexism, which includes the negative stereotypes associated with a minority sexual orientation (Rasmussen, 2004). The assumption is that by disclosing one’s sexual orientation, a person is bringing to light the reality of the GLB experience (Sears & Williams, 1997). These essentialist assumptions are based on the idea that “coming out” will lead to a positive self-identity.
From a poststructuralist standpoint, coming out has multiple purposes and meanings. As Cain (1991) points out, disclosing or concealing one’s sexual orientation can have multiple intents and should not be considered a reflection of the individual’s state of identity formation. By selectively disclosing or concealing one’s sexual orientation, a person can “reduce the inner costs of possessing a discrediting identity and protect their social identity in situations where disclosure may have negative consequences” (Cain, 1991, p. 72).

From a Foucauldian perspective, coming out is considered a form of power. Since power builds and establishes relationships, by disclosing or concealing one’s sexual orientation, an individual creates the boundaries of a relationship and exerts power over others. Decisions about disclosure or concealment involve power relations at work. For example, research has shown that Asian/American GLB individuals are more likely to disclose their sexual orientation to a friend or sibling, who is more likely than a parent to be understanding of their minority sexual orientation (Chan, 1989, 1992; Wooden et al., 1983). By concealing their sexual identity from their parents, these individuals may seek to maintain the power relationship that exists, and are fearful that disclosure would negatively change that relationship. These choices regarding disclosure or concealment are a reflection of power at work.

With these concepts in mind, one should remember that coming out is not an equitable experience for each individual. The use of the words “coming out” and the expectations associated with it are also an example of how language regarding sexual orientation is grounded in White, dominant culture. Considering the diversity in language proficiency and different expectations regarding disclosure of sexual orientation within
the Asian/American culture, it is quite possible that many Asian/Americans do not have
terminology equivalent to coming out. For these reasons, the term “coming out” will be
used sparingly throughout the rest of this project.

Limitations to Foucault

In general, poststructuralism has been criticized for being unclear and ambiguous,
which has resulted in a call for clarity in related research (St. Pierre, 2000). These
critiques, however, assume an “American discourse of anti-intellectualism that, on some
level, assumes that the ordinary person cannot understand complexity” (St. Pierre, 2000,
p. 478). This ambiguity has led many scholars to debate the meaning of his work. For
example, Hoy (1986) explores how Foucault’s use of power in his work expands on
previous research and theories and forces others to reassess their “understanding of
power, repression, and progress in modern society” (p. 124). On the other hand, scholars
like Said (1986) are critical of Foucauldian power because he believes that Foucault fails
to consider the range of possibilities in which power can function.

Additional criticism of Foucault and his work comes from the work of feminist
theorists. Soper (1995) best summaries this critique when she writes

I recognize, of course, that I am here only echoing the complaints of other critics
of Foucault that fail to offer any anchorage for his conception of power, which he
presents as both all encompassing yet curiously bereft of any rationale, direction
or purpose of a kind which might explain and justify his pejorative descriptions of
its effects; and that this is reflected in the tension between his activist critique of
power and his pessimist emphasis on the inevitability of domination. (Soper,
1995, p. 25)
In other words, Soper and other feminist critics believe that Foucault does not fully explain his rationale behind his theories of power yet espouses his belief that power is integral to explaining organizations and society. From these critics’ viewpoint, he explains that women are a part of the “discursive regimes of power” but does not explain the reason these regimes exist (Soper, 1995, p. 24). Foucault uses power and discourse as a way to explain why differences exist, yet does not offer any ways for individuals to overcome these power differences. Using power to reduce individuals to docile bodies is problematic for many feminists, as such assumptions disregard the emancipatory nature of feminism (Armstrong, 2003). I remain mindful of these criticism in my study as I attempt to explain how power, discourse, and knowledge have a role in the disclosure process for Asian/American GLB students.

Implications

Foucault’s concepts set up a useful and meaningful framework from which conclusions about Asian/American GLB students’ sexual identity formation can be drawn. As Foucauldian subjects, Asian/American GLB students are subjected to the effects of power/knowledge and regimes of truth. Collectively, these forces are what define different discourses. This framework is unique in that it considers identity formation to be nonlinear, unlike the traditional age-linked, stage development models. The Foucauldian framework also helps to reconceptualize key terms such as identity, Asian/American, GLB, and coming out within the scope of this study. This Foucauldian perspective will encourage college and university administrators to think differently about the role that they have in promoting the Asian/American GLB student experience,
and encourage them to create an environment where these students feel free to explore
their identity and feel safe in disclosing their sexual orientation if and when they desire.

Conclusion

Student development and identity development theories are useful ways to help
frame our understanding of the college experience and the impact these experiences have
on their education. A review of the literature on Asian/American, GLB, and
Asian/American GLB students and their identity development reveals several things.
First, studies of student identity development and the process of identity formation base
their work on developmental, stage theories. These stage theories essentialize individual
identity and fail to fully consider the interactions of other identity traits beyond what is
being studied. As a result, a general lack of knowledge about the identity formation
experience of Asian/American GLB students exists. In addition, studies on the college
experience of Asian/American students have largely centered on the examining the model
minority stereotype, either from an empirical or theoretical perspective. GLB student
research has focused on the coming out experience or have focused on the campus
climate for GLB (and transsexual/transgender) students. Finally, limited research exists
on Asian/American GLB students; the studies have been done have either used small
sample sizes or utilize the psychosocial, developmental approach.

In this study, I examine a significant aspect of the Asian/American GLB student
experience, i.e., disclosing or concealing their sexual identity, using this Foucauldian,
poststructural theoretical framework. This framework provides new insight into how
disclosure or concealment impacts these students’ sense of self, i.e., identity. This
framework also addresses the limitations of previous stage theories of identity
development and allows for individual differences to be taken into consideration. The Foucauldian viewpoint interconnects identity and identity formation with discourse, power, knowledge and the subject. While other scholars have illuminated potential limitations to Foucault’s work, I use the ambiguity as a way to freely explore how these concepts are integrated into students’ lives. By discussing the experiences of Asian/American GLB students in this way, I hope to bring to light the complexity of the Asian/American GLB experience and begin to have others realize the impact they can have on this group.
Chapter 5: Study Design

Introduction

For this study, I explored three central research questions. (1) What are the factors/issues process that leads Asian/American GLB students to disclose their sexual orientation? (2) How does the experience of disclosing their sexual identity affect their sense of self (i.e., construction of identity)? and (3) In what ways does a changing construction of identity impact their educational experience? In particular, the focus on Foucault and his works distinguishes this study from previous work on Asian/American GLB college students. A Foucauldian analysis operates under the assumption that multiple forms of reality are possible and necessary. Subsequently, all methodological choices have been made with this assumption in mind. In this chapter, I outline the epistemological approach and data collection methods utilized in this study. I also explain the rationale for the theoretical framework, participant selection, data collection, types of data, and its analysis. Finally, I describe the ethical considerations and its relevance to the study.

Epistemology: Constructionism

The epistemology is the fundamental paradigm under which a study operates (Crotty, 1998). This paradigm is the foundation of the research, as the assumptions under the epistemology inform the rest of the study. In this project, I examined the process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation to others through a Foucauldian framework. As the
process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation can vary across individuals, I operated under the assumption that multiple realities (i.e., multiple ways to disclose) are possible. Because of this objective, I needed an epistemology that would allow me to take subjectivity and multiple realities into consideration. These are characteristics of the constructionist epistemology, and specifically Fouaculdian constructionism (Miller, 2008), which is why I chose to utilize it for this study.

Several key points define the constructionist epistemology. First, “the researcher-respondent relationship is subjective, interactive, and interdependent” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 436). For this study, I established relationships with each of the participants, and my primary source of data was interviews with them. Without this “interactive, interdependent, and subjective” relationship, the depth and breadth of interview data I needed would not have been possible. Secondly, with this constructionist epistemology, “the values of the researcher, respondents, research site, and underlying theory cannot help but undergird all aspects of the research” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 436). In this study, all of these aspects were crucial to the study, as the respondents (students), research site (the university) and underlying theory (Foucault) were all key aspects of my inquiry. Finally, in constructionism, “the research product (e.g., interpretations) is context specific” (Broido & Manning, 2002, p. 436). Because of the study’s focus on the college experience, the results were contextual to the university being studied as well as, to some extent, higher education as a whole.

Analytical Tools: Situational Analysis and Extended Case Method

Since I was analyzing the students’ experience in college and their decisions regarding revealing their sexual orientation, I needed an analytical tool that would lend
itself towards studying a larger social situation. Therefore, I chose situational analysis (as described by Clarke, 2005). Situational analysis can be considered a form of extended case method. Extended case method uses previous theories to help explain the situation or social process being studied (Burawoy, 1991). The extended case method can be used “to assess whether deviation from certain norms is general or exceptional, why such deviation occurs, and how it is justified” (Velsen, 1978, p. 145). Situational analysis specifically uses Foucauldian, poststructuralist theory to explain and analyze the situation being studied.

Clarke (2005) developed situational analysis by seeking to “push grounded theory more fully around the postmodern turn through a new approach to analysis within the grounded theory framework” (p. xxi). As a methodology, the goal of grounded theory is to create and generate a new theory, based on the data and the data collection process (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is founded in positivism and humanistic approaches to scientific methodology (Clarke, 2005). It is based on an idea that absolute truth is possible and that generalizations can be made based on various forms of data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Situational analysis operates under the Foucauldian assumption that multiple truths are possible. Thus, while situational analysis uses data and data collection to explain a social situation, the final goal is not to develop a single theory, but rather to explain the phenomenon in a way that incorporates these multiple realities.

Situational analysis seeks to “regenerate” the “very popular and epistemologically sound approach” of grounded theory by incorporating aspects of poststructural, deconstructive research design (Clarke, 2005, p. xxi). Grounded theory works on the assumption that the applicability of theory “cannot be divorced from the process by
which it is generated” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 5). Thus, data analysis is a way to explain behavior. In this study, the “behavior” is the identity formation of Asian/American GLB students.

The advantage of using situational analysis is that it allows for the study of Asian/American GLB identity from a Foucauldian perspective. While traditional grounded theory examines single social issues, situational analysis takes the complexity of the social circumstances into consideration (Clarke, 2005; Velsen, 1978), and thus lends itself toward understanding the complexity of the university environment. Therefore, situational analysis allows us to better understand the subject (in this case Asian/American GLB students) and their decisions they make within this specific environmental context. In the following sections, I explain how participants were selected, the data collection process, including types of data, and the steps within situational analysis itself.

Participant Selection

Having attended and observed the crowd at a local gay pride parade and festival, anecdotally, I knew that I would have a limited number of potential participants. The participants for this study were Asian international and Asian American GLB students at a larger Midwestern university. The university has approximately 45,000 students, with about 5.2% of students identifying as Asian American. In addition, the university has over 4,500 international studies with a majority of those international students coming from Asian countries. In 2006, the university was named one of the top 20 gay-friendly campuses in the United States (Windmeyer, 2006) and has developed a reputation for being GLB friendly. Estimates as to the overall number of GLB individuals within
society vary greatly; many gay and lesbian communities estimate the population to be as high as 10% of the overall population (Smith, 2006). However, many researchers have found a 2-3% prevalence rate to be more common (as compiled by Smith, 2006). Combined, these statistics meant that I had a relatively small number of potential study participants to choose from at this university.

A challenge to this study was the fact that Asian/American GLB individuals are considered a hidden population. Heckathorn (1997) defines the hidden population as having:

Two characteristics: first, no sampling frame exists, so the size and boundaries of the population are unknown; and second, there exist strong privacy concerns, because membership involves stigmatized or illegal behavior, leading individuals to refuse to cooperate, or give unreliable answers to protect their privacy. (p. 174)

Asian/American GLB college students are considered a hidden population because no solid set of data exists as to their prevalence. In addition, privacy concerns existed because these students’ sexual orientation were central to this study. Research done on the disclosure process has shown that publicly disclosing one’s sexual orientation could lead to discrimination and experiences with homophobia and heterosexism (Evans & Broido, 1999; Rasmussen, 2004). Fear of the general population knowing their sexual orientation and the potential for prejudicial behavior may have been a reason why it was difficult to identify qualified and willing participants for this study.

Initially, in an attempt to find participants, I used both a general call for participants and a modified form of traditional snowball sampling. For the general call for participants, I used an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved flyer and
distributed it both electronically (e.g., the Multicultural Center GLBT Weekly electronic
digest) and posted hard copies in several areas throughout campus. An example of this
flyer can be found in Appendix A. When distributing the hard copies, I focused on
colleges and offices with higher concentrations of Asian/American students. After
reviewing enrollment data, I distributed flyers to faculty and teaching assistants in
engineering, chemistry, biochemistry, biology, microbiology, molecular genetics,
business, and social and behavioral sciences. My hope was that the faculty and teaching
assistants would know of potential individuals who could participate in the study and
would pass along the information from the flyer.

I also attempted a chain referral sampling method and met with several university
faculty and staff members who I thought would have close interactions with
Asian/American GLB students. Since little is know about the location of the
Asian/American GLB social network within the university, I believed that these
informants would act as the gatekeepers within the community and could be used to help
gain access to potential participants (Singer, 1999). For example, the Office of
Counseling and Consultation Services ran a support group for GLB persons of color.
These counselors were potential key informants who could help me identify potential
students for the study. While theoretically, this type of sampling should have helped me
to identify participants, in reality, I did not find a single participant using this method.

Ultimately, to find participants, I reached out to both Asian/American and GLBT
student organization leaders. I obtained a list of these groups from the Student Activities
Office website and e-mailed the leaders and advisors for each group. For each group, I
offered to lead a discussion on either the experiences of Asian/American GLB students or
on GLB students of color. I contacted 26 Asian/American student organization and nine
GLBT student organizations. In total, I presented to three GLBT student organizations
and two Asian/American student organizations. I also attended two socials put on by a
GLBT student organization for graduate students. From attending the socials and
presenting to these groups, I obtained all but two of my participants. Of the two that I did
not obtain through student organizations, one I met at a campus event sponsored by the
campus GLBT student services office and the other participant was referred to me by a
former student leader of a GLBT student organization. All of the participants consented
to the initial interview and received a $25 bookstore gift card for their time. The consent
forms (both the original and addendum) can be found in Appendix B.

One key issue in identifying qualified participants for this study was related to
their sexual orientation. Sexual identity is a fluid concept that involves the
interrelationship between sexual desire and sexual behavior (Svab & Kuhar, 2008;
Takagi, 1994). For this study, I utilized self-identified GLB individuals. The goal was to
find out how they came to understand themselves as GLB and ultimately disclose this
aspect of their identity to others, thus making self-identified individuals the most
meaningful for this study.

Data Collection

For this study, the primary source of data was nine semi-structured interviews
with self-identified Asian international and Asian American GLB undergraduate and
graduate students. Table 1 summarizes the participants used in this study. I should note
that I chose to give the participants Anglo-Saxon pseudonyms. I acknowledge that doing
so takes away an aspect of their self-identity. However, I remained concerned about the
anonymity of the participants and thus chose to uniformly give them Anglo-Saxon names.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Country of Origin or Background</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Self-identified Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>International?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Korean-adoptee</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrie</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Pansexual</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>1st year Masters</td>
<td>Taiwanese/Biracial</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>1st year Masters</td>
<td>Taiwanese</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabby</td>
<td>Masters-exchange program</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard</td>
<td>PhD Candidate</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>1st year Masters</td>
<td>Vietnamese/Biracial</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Summary of Characteristics of Study Participants (Pseudonyms used)

Since the purpose of this study was to examine their decisions to reveal or conceal their sexual orientation, interviews with these individuals were crucial, as these provided insight into how they decided to disclose or conceal their sexual orientation. Initial interviews took between one and two hours to complete. These interviews were transcribed with initial analysis being simultaneously conducted with transcription.

To supplement the findings from the interviews, I utilized secondary sources, including participant and community observations and document analysis. All participants allowed me to observe them in other locations. These locations included student organization meetings (including the meeting where I initially recruited many of
the participants), campus and community events. Since their personal relationships with others were crucial to my study, observing them interacting with others helped to support or undermine any statements made by participants during the initial interviews. Besides these participant-specific observations, I also made some general observations and conducted fieldwork within both the university and surrounding communities. These observations occurred at a city-wide gay pride festival and parade, along with campus-wide socials and informational fairs. These observations provided insight into the dynamics of the GLBT community, and also provided me with an understanding of how Asian/American GLB individuals were or were not involved.

The document analysis served to supplement information obtained through the interview process. University documents, such as statements and reports on diversity and inclusiveness and the faculty/teaching assistant handbook, helped to support or not support students’ opinions about the campus climate. Additionally, participants had the option of providing me with access to their online social networking sites (such as Facebook) and/or providing me with copies of any relevant journals or papers. All but one participant allowed me to follow them through online networks and two participants provided personal journals and papers. Access to these profiles on social networking sites (SNS) was crucial as it allowed me to enter into this world, and see how they built and established themselves within it.

*Time Magazine* recently reported that the use of online social networking can make the coming out process easier for GLBT individuals (Brooks, 2009). By accessing any online profiles created by these individuals, I had the chance to see if and how they disclose their sexual orientation to others online. Similarly, the access to journals and
papers helped to either support or discredit any inferences students made during the interviews. Overall, these methods were intended to address the objective at hand and ultimately helped to solidify the conclusions in this study.

*Interview Questions*

Since the interviews with participants were semi-structured, I conducted them with some general questions in mind. However, the students in this study were free to direct the discussion in the way they felt most comfortable. The topics I discussed included asking them to describe themselves in their own words, describing how they came to understand their non-heterosexual orientation, their family and friends’ reaction to their sexual orientation, and revealing how they feel about their college experience. Appendix C includes a general list of questions used during the interview process.

*Data Collection and Management*

Interviews were conducted in person at locations of participants’ choosing. Pseudonyms were used to remove any potential personally identifiable information from transcriptions and analysis. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA 2007 software.

A variety of documents were also collected for analysis. These included social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), university documents, participants’ academic papers, and personal online journals/blogs. Any personal information was removed from participants’ personal documents prior to analysis. All personal documents were electronically obtained so data could be encrypted prior to analysis.

The need to maintain confidentially in the collection and management of the data from this study was important because of the potentially sensitive personal information
that participants were asked to disclose. Studies have shown that revealing one’s sexual orientation within some environmental context could lead to individuals experiencing discrimination and harassment (Rankin, 2003; Stevens, 2004). Therefore, the importance of confidentiality was further magnified to avoid having this information damage participants’ personal lives. These ethical considerations will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Reliability and validity are terms associated with quantitative research. Reliability is a measure of how well the results reflect the population being studied; validity measures the accuracy of what is being tested (Golafshani, 2003). From a qualitative perspective, researchers address the trustworthiness of one’s findings. Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Golafshani, 2003) state that there is not validity without reliability in qualitative studies because researchers are simultaneously examining both the consistency of the data collection process and the quality of the data itself (Golafshani, 2003).

I address dependability and trustworthiness through triangulation. Triangulation is a way to control bias and improve the dependability of the data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Data triangulation is especially important within the constructionist paradigm because when operating under the assumption that multiple forms of reality are possible, having multiple sources of data from which to draw those conclusions improves the quality and rigor of the results (Crotty, 1998; Golafshani, 2003).

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) point out, credibility is one way to help establish trustworthiness in a qualitative study. My design choices and data sources were made
with this credibility in mind. Appendix D includes a summary of the amount and types of
data collected. Admittedly, my data was skewed, with a majority of data coming from
the interviews. These interviews were important because I wanted to inquire about and
analyze each participants’ lived experience and his/her interpretation of that experience.
Thus, I had to understand their perspective and point of view. The secondary sources of
data helped to support these individual interpretations and thus helped to establish
credibility. The multiple sources of data helped to establish the credibility of both the
participants and the credibility of this study.

Reflexivity as a Researcher

As a self-identified, second generation, Japanese American, heterosexual female,
I came to this study with my own unique view of the world and my place within it. In
addition, being an Asian American heterosexual, I expected and was asked by
participants why I was studying GLB individuals. In one case, a participant outright
asked me if I was gay. Subsequently, I had to identify my own biases and acknowledge
my point of view prior to embarking on this project. Interestingly, my own biases and
discomfort with my different sexual orientation created a unique power differential that I
will further explore when I present and discuss the results.

To help identify my biases, I kept a research journal from the beginning until the
end of the study. This journal helped me to keep “an ongoing record of [my] experiences,
reactions, and emerging awareness of any assumptions or biases that come to the fore”
(Morrow, 2005, p. 254). These points of awareness were addressed and integrated into
the forthcoming analysis. These insights were important within the context of situational
analysis, as these were part of the complex social situation being studied.
Doing Situational Analysis

After transcribing all data in MAXQDA 2007, an initial round of coding was done to all data, yielding an initial set of 12 major codes. After a second round of coding, I created 29 sub-codes within these major codes. Appendix E lists the codes that I created. (The major codes are in all capital letters.) During the second round of coding, I focused on analyzing the data through a Foucauldian lens, and thus focused on creating sub-codes that further detailed the major themes.

The key to conducting situational analysis is the mapping process. As Clarke (2005) explains, mapping allows for “relational analyses” in a way that allows “for handling multiplicity, heterogeneity, and messiness in ways that can travel” (p. 30). Clarke suggests three kinds of maps when conducting situational analysis, 1) situational maps, 2) social worlds/arenas maps, and 3) positional maps. Using the initial set of codes as reference, I created a situational map for each participant, while focusing on the different factors influencing their decision to reveal or conceal their sexual orientation. A computer-recreated, generic example of a situational map is included in Appendix F. The goal of the situational map is to “lay out… the important human and nonhuman elements in situation of concern of the research broadly conceived” (Clarke, 2005, pp. 86-87). At the end of the situational map, I was also able to take notes that were helpful in developing social world and positional maps described below.

Using these situational maps as points of reference, I then created a social world/arena map. I took the themes developed from the situational maps and organized them into different social worlds or arenas. This map showed the relationships between various discourses affecting the students’ decision-making regarding revealing their
sexual orientation and their overall self-identity. As Clarke (2005) points out, the social world/arena map seeks to answer the question “What are the patterns of collective commitment and what are the salient social worlds operating here?” (p. 110). An example of the social world/arena map that I developed is included in Appendix G.

Finally, from these social world/arena maps, I created positional maps. Using the social world/arena map and situational maps as reference, I could use positional maps to compare all of the participants across two different variables (each represented along an x and y axis). The positional maps helped me to answer the key research questions by analyzing the relationship between (1) disclosing or concealing one’s sexual orientation (x) and the discourses (y) within these participants’ lives, (2) the relationship between participants’ overall self-identity (x) and their willingness to reveal their sexual orientation (y), and (3) the relationship between their educational experience (x) and their willingness to reveal their sexual orientation (y). An example of a positional map (specifically examining question 2) that I created is included in Appendix H.

Finally, my personal journal entries were useful in incorporating my reflexivity as a researchers into the final data analysis. These journal entries helped bring to light my own biases as they pertained to the topic. These journal entries and researcher reflexivity helped to distinguish this methodology from more traditional grounded theory (Clarke, 2005). As Clarke (2005) states, “we are, through the very act of research itself, directly in the situation we are studying” (p. 12). With situational analysis, the researcher’s prior knowledge and biases are not ignored and thus become vital to analysis itself. After initially coding the data, I reviewed the journals with the coding and themes in mind. These reflections contributed to the conclusions that I made within the study.
Ethical Considerations

Within the study design, I had to consider the potential for harm to others, including to participants, the larger community and to myself as the researcher (Magolda & Weems, 2002). This potential to do harm goes beyond the Institutional Review Board, as many of these risks are not known until researchers are fully immersed in the process (Magolda & Weems, 2002).

The potential for harm to the participants themselves is of central concern. As Magolda and Weems (2002) point out, participants may blindly sign a consent to participate form without fully understanding any potential harm participation might bring. To address this, I formally reviewed all consent forms with the participants, with particular emphasis on confidentiality measures, and gave them copies of all forms. I also gave them my contact information in case they had additional concerns or questions about the study after the initial interview. To address potential harm, I also let participants chose the location for the interview. In a few of the cases, the participants initially chose a public or semi-public location for the interview. Once the interview process was explained and it was clear that they would be giving potentially sensitive personal information, I offered to change locations. In two of the cases, the participants did chose to change locations to either an empty classroom or private office.

I also remained mindful of the potential impact this research would have in my own life. Since researchers are integral to qualitative studies, they risk portraying themselves in a potentially damaging ways (Magolda & Weems, 2002). For us, “the risk of inducing harm to the self comes in the form of compromises and sacrifices, and are part of the ‘productive discomfort’ of engaging in researching the lives of others”
(Herzfeld, as cited in Magolda & Weems, 2002, p. 502). Keeping a journal helped to address this issue. Documenting my own points of discomfort as they occurred was a useful tool as I engaged in the final write up of the data.

Finally, the political implications of this study cannot be ignored. All qualitative studies are at least in some way political (Magolda & Weems, 2002), meaning the studies will have supporters and detractors. With this study, I was in the position to determine what information was potentially harmful and how that information was conveyed within the study; therefore, I was in a position to influence the opinions of those supporters and detractors. As the researcher, being in the power position meant that I should “think critically about [my] own position in the construction of knowledge” (Magolda & Weems, 2002, p. 504). This statement reflects the Foucauldian idea of the role of power in constructing knowledge (Foucault, 1977a). Being in that power position meant I had an integral role in constructing and forming a knowledge base. For this study, I discovered how students operate in that power role when forming their identity, but to do so, I also needed to remain cognizant of my power position and the impact it could have on the research process.

Conclusion

My methodological approach in the study helped me to gain an initial understanding of the students’ lives and implications of their decision-making on both their decisions to disclose their sexual orientation and their overall educational experience. In the following chapters, I present my findings and detail their implications for higher education policy and practice.
Chapter 6: Decisions to Disclose

Introduction

The students in this study all navigated a series of discourses in their daily lives. These discourses included higher education, home life, country of origin (for international students), religion, and social networking sites. Their decisions about revealing their sexual orientation were largely dependent on which discourses were prominent in their lives at any particular moment. Most often, the students did not feel that these discourses intersected and were thus comfortable revealing their sexual orientation in one setting and concealing it in others.

Foucault defines discourse as a set of ideas, concepts, and beliefs that lead to an accepted way of viewing the world (1970; 1972). Within the context of this study, the identified discourses were significant aspects of the students’ physical and emotional environments. These discourses shaped the students’ attitudes and beliefs, as the individuals within this discourses all had different points of view that affected the students. From these discourses, the participants became Foucauldian subjects, and in turn, contributed to creating their environment and further contributing to the discourse. The students in this study did not discuss these different environments in terms of discourses. Instead, they explained their experiences in terms of different settings and situations. They understood that people within each setting had their own set of
expectations and belief systems and that their decisions to disclose or conceal their sexual orientation were shaped around those expectations. In the following sections, I detail each of the discourses and the impact these had on the students’ decision-making.

Home Life

The students in the study each had different home situations. For example, Beth was born in South Korea, but she and her brother were adopted by a White couple. She thought of her parents as conservative, mostly because of their strong Catholic values. Adam’s parents and sister lived in South Korea. He described his father as “open-minded” and his mother as “socially conservative.” The students’ perceptions of their family members created unique dynamics within each family unit. In the following, I explain the relationships that the students had with family members and explain how they were built within a Foucauldian power dynamic. In turn, I will show how this power dynamic influenced the students’ decisions about revealing their sexual orientation.

Parental Roles and Expectations

One type of relationship built on a Foucauldian power dynamic is the parent/child one. At the time of the interviews, three of the nine participants (Beth, Dan, Ian) had already revealed their sexual orientation to both parents. One participant (Adam) revealed his orientation to his father but not his mother. The rest of the participants had not told either of their parents about their sexual orientation. Originally, Beth did not intend on telling her parents about her sexual orientation, but instead was surprised when confronted by her parents. She described their reaction as “negative.”

I didn’t have to go like to straight camp or anything but I wasn’t supposed to see her [her girlfriend] anymore. I don’t know… I didn’t give enough time because I
told them, oh I think I’m bisexual and that’s my girlfriend. And then like a week later, I was like no I’m gay. But at that point, I already knew so I think I just jumped the gun like too soon.

While her parents did not cut off ties, they were not fully accepting of her sexual orientation. After Beth broke up with her girlfriend, all conversations with her parents about her sexual orientation stopped. When describing the current situation, she said, “I don’t know if they still think that but initially they thought it was a phase. And then since we don’t talk about it anymore, I don’t know if they’re ashamed and maybe that’s why they didn’t tell or just they didn’t want to because they thought that I wasn’t serious about it.” At the time of the interview, Beth was comfortable with not discussing her sexual orientation with her parents and wanted to avoid any further conflict with them. For Beth, revealing her orientation to her parents was forced upon her. The power her parents were given through the parent/child relationship empowered them to ask Beth about her sexual orientation. While she said that she would not deny her sexual orientation when asked, she was content to avoid any future discussions about it with her parents so as not to further disrupt the relationship dynamic.

In spite of fears of rejection, Dan and Ian initiated the conversation and chose to reveal their sexual orientation to their parents. In both cases, their parents were accepting of their sexual orientation. For Dan, the burden of concealing his orientation took an emotional toll. Hearing that his parents unconditionally accepted him, in spite of being gay, helped affirm his gay identity, and increased his compassion for those who did not have that kind of support. After receiving this support from his parents, revealing his
orientation to other family members was less stressful, and he found unconditional support from them all.

For Ian, concealing his sexual orientation was both physically and emotionally draining. He saw disclosure to his mother as a way of healing himself. As he said,

But you know I figured it’s just probably better not to like hide something like that because I felt that it was actually damaging to me physically because I was hiding something so much. And actually it was; I got really, really sick and had surgery, with ulcers and stuff. So, you know, I finally told my mom and she was like, “Oh, I know.” I was like, “What?”

He then told his mother that she could have saved him from physical and emotional pain if she let him know that she suspected that he was gay.

Both Dan and Ian were compelled to tell their parents because of the physical and emotional burden that concealing their orientation had on them. While they risked rejection from their parents, the toll that concealment took on them outweighed this potential. Because Beth’s parents discovered her orientation, she did not have that same burden, and thus was not compelled to continue further discussions with her parents about the topic.

The students who had not told their parents cited several reasons as to why. Carrie, Frances, Howard, and Gabby feared that their parents would disown them and would no longer want a meaningful relationship. Their parents’ religious or political views contributed to creating this fear. Carrie described her parents’ views about homosexuality as the following
They’re very conservative… We haven’t talked about gay people much. It’s like VERY under the rug kind of thing. But they have said that they really don’t agree with it… They think it’s abnormal and they it’s like gross. I just keep it quiet. Because of her parents’ opinions about homosexuality, she did not want to reveal her orientation to her parents until she could financially support herself. Keeping her orientation concealed from her parents had financial benefits as they paid for her education; she believed that she would not receive any support from them if she revealed her sexual orientation. Frances was in a similar situation and is also waiting until she is financially self-sufficient before telling her parents. For both Carrie and Frances, their parent/child relationship also included financial support. They both feared that revealing their sexual orientation could disrupt the relationship to the point that they would lose that support. As a result, they were not willing to take that risk.

Gabby and Howard were both international students whose parents lived in China. Both express that being GLB was socially not accepted within mainstream Chinese culture. As Gabby said, “My family is very traditional. Once I told them I have a gay friend and they said, you better don’t stay so close with gays or lesbians.” Howard constantly felt pressure from his parents to get married and have children. He felt this pressure to the point where he pondered marrying a woman.

I want to settle down but I don’t know how to deal with my parents though. So I mean everyone in my extended family was questioning me why I don’t have a girlfriend, and I don’t know, it’s going to be tough. Sometimes, I think maybe I just get married to a girl, maybe I should try it, maybe I’ll like it, getting married to a girl. But that’s a huge step… Even if I do that, I’d know I’ll be more attracted
to guys than girls because I don’t know how to deal with that after I get married. I don’t know.

Howard knew gay Chinese men who marry women, yet continued to be sexually active with men. He therefore contemplated doing the same. For Gabby and Howard, their parents’ traditional values made them hesitant to tell their parents about their sexual orientation. Because of these values, they felt that their parents could reject them and end the relationship.

Finally, Adam’s mother also had these traditional values, which is why he told her father but not his mother about his sexual orientation. As he described,

My mom is socially not politically conservative. In Asia, I don’t know about all Asia but in Korea at least, moms are more concerned about their sons and…fatherhood and stuff. So I will come out someday because I really want to get married to someone in the future, and I don’t want to be there alone. I’m gonna come out but I don’t know when it’s going to be.

Adam feared that his mother would reactively negatively but at some point planned to tell her about his sexual orientation. He wanted support from his parents if he were to get married, and this desire for support is what motivated him to eventually want to tell his mother.

Howard and Adam’s hesitancy to tell both or one parent reflects the hesitancy that many Asian/American GLB individuals have to tell their parents, for fear of disrupting the traditional cultural family values (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000; Chan, 1989, 1992) which often include the expectation that they start a family and have children, presumably in a heterosexual relationship (Kimmel & Huso, 2004). For Carrie, Gabby,
and Frances, their hesitancy reflected the general homophobia often associated with the Asian/American culture (Chan, 1989, 1992; Kimmel & Huso, 2004). For all of the students, the potential for rejection from their parents weighed into their decisions to reveal their orientation. On some level, their parents either communicated to them that gay, lesbian, or bisexual behavior and identity was either unacceptable or simply did not discuss GLB identity in the household, leaving them unsure of how their parents would react. For Dan and Ian, the burden that concealing was taking on them outweighed any potential rejection by family. The other students were not experiencing such conflict and thus decided not to tell their parents.

On a different note, Edward’s situation illustrated the importance of language in communicating expectations associated with the home life discourse. Edward had not told his parents and was actually confident that they would be accepting of his bisexuality. However, Edward was not sure exactly how to tell them. Much like other Asian/American households (Akerlund & Cheung, 2000; Chan, 1989; Greene, 1994), sexual orientation was not a topic that was discussed in his home life; as a result, he did not know exactly what language to use to communicate his bisexuality to his parents. In his case, the lack of discussion about sexual orientation as a child made Edward unsure of exactly how to communicate his bisexuality in the present.

The parent-child relationship and dynamic was the primary foundation for this aspect of the home life discourse. This relationship was founded in a power dynamic where the parents had either communicated negative attitudes about homosexuality or had not discussed their beliefs about the subject. The students disseminated this information to help them determine if they wanted to reveal their orientation to them. Part
of the students’ hesitancy in revealing their sexual orientation was fear of disrupting the relationship and power dynamic between themselves and their parents.

**Relationship with Other Family**

A different type of power dynamic existed between the students and other family members. Dan initially had concern about telling his stepbrother about his gay identity. He explained in the following,

He is 11 years older, and because he was in a biker gang, was in the Navy SEALS, like head PTSD, was a trucker. He’s a construction worker now, and in all of these very stereotypical, very hyper-masculine groups. I was just afraid of him. I was afraid of his rejection. He said, “[Dan], I knew since you were 11. I was just waiting for you to tell me.” I was like, “Excuse me?” It’s like, “I didn’t want to insult you, but yeah, I knew.”

And so we just were plastered at this point on tequila I think when I told him and he said, “Yes, I really…” I said, “Well, I’m sorry that I didn’t trust you sooner.” And he’s like, “I can understand though.” I talked about some of the things that he did that really made me question him. He’s like, “you know I can kind of see how you would think that and I’m sorry for that, for the part I played in making you not trust me.”

Ian, who had four other brothers and sisters, also said that revealing his orientation to the rest of his family was “pretty easy,” in spite of the fact that his sister was a born again Christian. In fact, all of the participants with a sibling had revealed their orientation to that sibling, illustrating that they had less concern telling their sibling about their sexual orientation.
The fact that the students felt that their siblings could relate and be accepting of their sexual orientation showed a mutual understanding regarding their upbringing and a mutual understanding of how sexual orientation was discussed in their household. In addition, as suggested in the research literature (Grov et al., 2006), the 1.5 and second generation immigrant students and their siblings likely grew up learning Western values and philosophies; these often conflicted with their parents’ more conservative point of view. The students’ willingness to tell their siblings also illustrated the open nature of their sibling relationship. Because they were raised under the same discursive regime, i.e., their parental home life, they developed a relationship founded in the values and beliefs communicated through this discourse. In some cases, the sibling helped the student hide his/her sexual orientation from their parents, because the sibling knew that their parents would not be accepting. Frances had this type of relationship with her older sister. She described the relationship. “I mean she knows, especially my dad. He’s more conservative. So then, we do a lot of stuff behind our parents back secretly. Just like the both of us knows.”

On the other hand, the students were hesitant to reveal their sexual orientation to older relatives, such as grandparents, because they felt that their grandparents could not relate to their experiences. They thought that the discourse these relatives were raised under was a discourse that was not accepting of a minority sexual orientation. Adam explained this relationship and dynamic the best when he said,

I mean my grandparents went through the war, Korean war. It was like 1950… I really envy American people because their parents went to college so they have something in common to talk about, especially when they went to the same
college. Or grandmas, they are educated, but our society is not like that. My grandparents are like really uneducated. I mean not MY grandparents like my grandparents’ generation is normally uneducated or undereducated because of the war. And my father’s generation is like when the dictatorship was over there so like the society changes so fast so we don’t have something in common to share. So especially my grandparents like it is really hard to imagine to talk to them because like they don’t know anything basically.

Consistent with the research (Grov et al., 2006), the students with grandparents assumed that they were not raised to accept GLB identity because of generational differences and thus would not be accepting of their own sexual orientation. Thus, they saw this generational difference (created in part due to the historical, geographical, and cultural differences) as a barrier to revealing their orientation. From their point of view, revealing their orientation to grandparents was not worth potentially disrupting their current relationship with them.

The relationships the students formed with both siblings and grandparents were created within a Foucauldian power dynamic. The students saw the relationships with their siblings as more linear. While each individual had his/her own role, they viewed their sibling as someone they could trust and could understand the problems associated with being GLB. On the other hand, they did not see their relationship with their grandparents as linear, but rather hierarchical. They believed that their grandparents could not understand their orientation and could not understand their experiences associated with it. Adam explained how he views telling his grandparents best when he said, “I mean my family. I mean important people in my life are my parents, my sister,
and my friends... I mean they are important but like I don’t risk myself for them. You know what saying?... I’m not gonna risk my identity for them.” In other words, Adam felt disconnected from his grandparents, likely for a variety of reasons, including generational and cultural differences. In his mind, Adam felt that telling his grandparents about his sexual orientation would only bring about negative consequences, thus in doing so, he felt that he would be “risking” his identity for them. Therefore, Adam did not feel that revealing his sexual orientation to his grandparents was something that he had to do.

**Impact of Relationship Status**

When asked when they might reveal their orientation to parents or family, several of the students said that they would be compelled to if they were in a long-term, romantic relationship. Beth explained that she would likely tell extended family members if she was in a relationship but was not currently compelled to tell them.

If I found a long-term relationship, and it was THAT serious, it wouldn’t be necessary, but it would help to tell them. But for now, I mean I’m 18, I’m not gonna like get involved that much. Um. I don’t tell them for now. But if the situation comes about I guess I, yeah I would. Therefore, Beth was content with keeping her orientation concealed from her family until she was in that situation.

For the self-identified bisexual students in the study, the gender of their partner impacted how they would reveal their orientation to parents and family. If they were in a heterosexual relationship, the students said that they would likely tell their family that they were heterosexual, and not bisexual. Gabby, when talking about a long-term relationship, said that she would tell her parents about her bisexuality if she was in a
relationship but when pressed further about the gender of her partner said “If it’s a guy, probably I don’t tell them. I keep it to myself.” Edward did not want to reveal his bisexuality to his parents unless he was in a serious relationship. However, if he ended up with a woman, he said that he would reveal himself as heterosexual. When asked why he would do this, he said, “To come out as gay and then backtrack and say ‘oh wait’ I’m marrying this woman… I feel like if I had a more defined sexuality maybe it’d be easier.” Edward’s understanding of his bisexuality left him feeling that he was without a solid sexuality identity. He felt pressure to choose a sexual identity and believed that a relationship would make it easier for him to do so.

Any potential romantic relationships for these students would be created within a Foucauldian power dynamic in that presumably, through navigating a discourse, the students would find a partner that would share their values and beliefs. With that relationship, the students would have less fear of rejection from other family members as the students would presumably have their partner for support. In spite of having less fear, the bisexual students in this study would still let their families presume that they were heterosexual if they were with an opposite sex partner. In that situation, the students did not foresee any benefits in revealing their bisexuality. Therefore, for most of these students, romantic partners would be a compelling reason for them to change the power dynamics within their home life and reveal their orientation to those individuals within it.

*Impact of Power on Home Life*

When asked how they learned about sexual orientation or asked if sexual orientation was discussed in the home, most of the students stated that the topic was not discussed in their household; therefore, the students had to seek out the information in
other ways. For the international students, finding this information was particularly
difficult. As Howard described, “I don’t think I’ll be exposed to the concept of gay 
people had I not been gay myself because… there’s no such thing as gay rights in China 
though. So you don’t get the publicity or anything like and the internet is censored so 
unless like you’ve got friends or you go search, you don’t come across gay issues very 
often in China.” Similarly, the Asian American students in the study also had to seek 
information about GLB identity and behavior because they never discussed it in their 
household. Carrie admitted to learning about sexual orientation through the internet. As 
she said,

I would be home all day. And I have no car and I don’t have a cell phone or 
anything. And all my friends busy with their work. So I just like go on the internet 
and play games and stuff. And then you’d see a lot there. Gay stuff going on. You 
know? And then that’s how I kind of discovered it. I was like ‘oh that’s there’ so. 
It’s a nice thing.

Because sexual orientation was not discussed at home, their knowledge about the subject 
came from other sources. In this case, the power dynamics between the students and their 
family forced them to seek out this information. Some, like Howard, had difficulty 
finding this information; others, like Carrie, used the internet.

Rather than try to change the dynamics within his family, Ian grew to accept the 
nature of his relationships with them. In one of his personal journals, in referring to his 
family. He wrote,

Did I lose friends and family? Yes, I did. If I was with a Verizon Wireless plan, I 
would have saved more money as they wouldn’t be a part of my calling plan
anymore. My father and I haven’t spoken to each other in thirteen years. He threw me out of the house. My older sister became involved with a church, drank the punch and I believe would like to throw holy water on me. At least, she’ll tell me the vile was holy water but in fact acid just to prove I’ll burn for my sins. My younger brother is a born-again Christian. He didn’t take kindly years ago when I said, “Really? I’m a born-again virgin… It’s not going to last. Tell you what, you don’t tell me I’m going to burn in hell and give me religious quotes and I won’t tell you that you’ve joined a cult of ignorance.” We don’t relate well anymore.

Family is family though. I won’t change who they are, nor will they change me.

In this example, Ian’s family attempted to use power to control him (e.g., his father throwing him out or his siblings citing Christianity). By resisting their attempts to control him, Ian emerged as a Foucauldian subject, in this case an Asian/American gay male. By staying true to this identity, Ian admitted to having a strained relationship with his family members; at the same time, he had accepted this uneasy power dynamic and understood that this was how his relationship to his family was going to be.

In conclusion, these students carefully considered the power dynamics within their personal relationships with family members when deciding to disclose or conceal their sexual orientation. The foundation for these dynamics were often the cultural differences associated with Asian culture. With parents, the emotional and physical burden of concealing compelled some students to reveal their orientation; others did not want to disrupt the power dynamic within the relationship and thus kept their sexual orientation concealed. In all of these cases, power created these personal relationships, and their decision to reveal their orientation showed a willingness to change the dynamic
and potentially change the relationship. With siblings, the students did not perceive as big a risk of changing the power dynamic and relationship; therefore, they were more compelled to reveal their orientation to them.

For the students to reveal their orientation within the home life discourse, the students needed a convincing reason. While some already had that reason, others did not have it. Finally, these relationships meant that these students often did not discuss sexual orientation while growing up within the home life. This avoidance of the topic forced these students to seek out knowledge about sexual orientation from other sources.

Religion

One area where some students felt that they could seek out information was in church. For some students, religion was a major discourse in their lives. For others, religion may have been important early in life, but as they struggled with their sexual orientation, they became increasingly disenfranchised with it. Finally, for some, religion was not a serious part of their own lives, but they recognized the importance that it had for others. In this final scenario, the students still managed the religious discourse in order to establish relationships and friendships with others.

The different ways in which the students managed religion reflects the diversity of religions within the Asian American community. In a 2008 survey (Kosmin & Keysar, 2009), while a majority of the Asian Americans surveyed identified as Catholic or Christian, a significant number also identified as Agnostic or with one of the Eastern Religions (such as Hindu and Buddhist). In addition, different religions dominate different Asian countries (Le, 2010). For example, in the Philippines, over 80% of the population is either Catholic or Protestant while in Japan, over 80% are either Buddhist
or Shinto. This diversity in religions meant that the students all learned about religion in different ways. The following sections detail how they managed that religious discourse within their daily lives.

Religion as a Primary Discourse

The norms and values communicated through the religious discourse affected the students in different ways. Beth was raised Catholic. While she knew that homosexuality was not accepted within the Catholic church, she was committed to the church and its teaching. When asked to explain why, she said,

I just feel like I have a lot to be thankful for. And so I feel that’s the best place…
I’m not like trying to be conceited but like I feel I’m pretty smart and I’m pretty athletic and I’m like pretty all-around talented I guess. So I know that there’s someone to thank for it, and like just my life, being adopted and I don’t know how well our home situation would have been back in Korea but like I have a pretty good life here so I guess I feel the need to go to Church then. For those reasons.

Subsequently, Beth hid her sexual orientation from church members. When asked why she hid her orientation, she responded,

I’m not really out to anyone like in my church groups just because I’m not so much scared; I [just] don’t know how they will react. I think that’s the one group I would be most uncomfortable bringing it up. Just because of the principles behind religion.

Similarly, Carrie was raised in a Christian household. She went to church every Sunday with her family and participated in Bible study. However, in Carrie’s case, she
received mixed messages about homosexuality from pastors in her church, and said that “I’m just figuring out where Jesus plays in my life... I’m praying to have him guide me along the way.” For Carrie, religion was a reason that she kept her sexual orientation hidden from her parents. She said that her parents would probably pray that she broke up with the person if she was in a same-sex relationship. She also revealed her orientation to her sister at a church event. As she described,

   It was like during um this church thing, what’s it called? Those big conferences.
   And the pastor was talking to us, and he was like “come out with the truth. Just say who you are. Like Jesus will accept you.” Like that. It was very emotional.
   Everyone was crying… so I guess I was kind of that mentality. And uh, I told her like what was up. And she was like “oh, is that it? That’s all?”

For both Beth and Carrie, the religious discourse was a compelling reason for them not to tell their parents about their sexual orientation. At the same time, it helped Carrie tell her sister as she was moved by the sermon given by her pastor.

   Other students grew up practicing a specific religion and developed beliefs built on that religion. Dan grew up Southern Baptist, but became disillusioned with the religion once he understood its views on homosexuality. Dan described his current views on religion,

   But for the longest time, I didn’t want to hate God and I didn’t want to hate all the people I knew because of their bigoted thinking, and so I just kind of went on a religious hiatus. I wanted to figure out myself and these other domains, you know academically, socially, um internally before I reengaged the religious piece on a social level because ultimately religion is a social construct.
You know it’s spirituality is our own direct intimate relationship with the sacred and then religion is kind of this cap that we put over it that informs us about how it thinks about the sacred and ourselves, and so my own disconnection with it, it’s something that I’m still in the formative stages of doing.

Dan understood that his Southern Baptist upbringing disrupted his own search for self-identity, and therefore consciously made a decision to step away from practicing the religion. Religion was a major aspect of Dan’s life growing up, but once he realized that his religion would not allow him to freely explore and discover his sexual identity, he went on what he termed a “religious hiatus.”

For Howard, religion became a prominent discourse while in college in China, when he converted to Christianity after befriending a group of Christian American missionaries. His experience reflected a growing presence of Christian missionaries in China; in stark contrast to Chinese antireligious policies (Elegant, 2006). When questioned about the Christian messages about homosexuality, he said that he felt that they were wrong. After coming to the United States, he attended a church where the pastor gave a sermon about sexual immorality. Howard described the reaction to the sermon,

Somehow after the sermon, actually several guys talked to him about their problems and I was one of them… I [felt] relieved to get it off my chest. So that’s why I came out to my pastor. He encouraged people to go and talk to him about it.

This pastor then referred Howard to an ex-gay ministry. He attended the ministry for a few months before his boyfriend at the time encouraged him to stop. At the time of the
interview, Howard admitted to not having attended church “in a while.” In spite of his disillusionment with the church, when asked, Howard still considered himself to be Christian and would attend church again if it was a gay-friendly establishment.

Overall, the students managed the discourse of religion in different ways. Howard needed to be connected to the church and its discourse and was seeking a balance between the church’s teachings and its stance on homosexuality. Whereas Dan consciously broke away from religion in order to explore his sexual identity, Howard still wanted to remain connected to it. Under the proper circumstances, he did not believe his religion would impact the formation of his sexual identity. Beth, who was a freshman, had not realized that her religion could impede development of her sexual identity and thus remained connected with it. Carrie had started to realize that her religion could negatively impact her exploration of her sexual identity, and while she still attended church with her family, she expressed some disillusion about the religious discourse and was trying to figure out the role of religion in her life.

**Considerations in Relationships**

Even if the study participants were not religious, they all felt that they needed to consider other people’s religious affiliation when deciding to disclose their sexual orientation. In this study, Christianity was the religion most often mentioned. The students revealed that they were less likely to disclose their orientation to an acquaintance who was Christian. Beth was hesitant to tell her church youth group about her sexual orientation. As she stated, “I don’t know what would happen. I don’t think I’d get kicked out of the group but I think like talk would start and I don’t really want that.” Adam
hesitated discussing any topics related to his sexual orientation if he found out that the individuals are Christian. As he said,

But they’re Christian, they’re not like me… But I know mentally that is not true. But I still have some problem dealing with Christian people. Because when I get angry I can’t clearly assert what I want to say. I get really excited and I can’t really breathe well and those kind of things. So I try not hear them [talking] about gay people or something.

While Adam was cautious around those that identified as Christian, he recognized that he likely had no reason to be concerned. As he said,

I know it’s not really true because I had a good friend last year and she’s really, really Christian. She is really Christian, and she’s Southern Baptist, but she was very accepting. And… I mean think she’s really cool because she is really sincere and she loves God, and she has this Bible studies every week, and she read Bible as something, and she takes Bible classes a lot. But she doesn’t have any problem with me being gay.

In spite of this realization, Adam was still at a stage where religion was a factor to consider when establishing relationships. His comments reflected the points of view of many of the other students in the study.

Edward, rather than being concerned about an individual’s religion, was more concerned about how bisexuality was accepted as whole by society. As he said,

Well, okay so when I was growing up the more vocal people were mad about Christianity have been Presbyterians and Jehovah’s Witnesses. And of course you know Jehovah’s Witnesses were very fundamentalist in terms of church being
required. And of course I read the Bible cover to cover. And Hall says repeatedly in the New Testament homosexuality is NOT okay. So I guess because of this fundamentalism that I’ve grown up within my, in my environment, it does make me feel more fearsome. I feel more feared than I am personally… because I do feel it’s not out there. And so it’s like if I just overcome this in my own mind, it’s not a problem.

Edward was concerned that bisexuality was largely hidden and not discussed by society, which led him to state that he felt “it’s not out there.” Combined with the Christian doctrine that condemns homosexuality, Edward feared that society would ostracize him.

In some cases, the students did lose friends because those friends could not accept their sexual orientation, citing their religion. For Ian, this rejection came as a surprise to him.

I initially didn’t think it would be too much of an issue because the second person I came out to was my best friend in high school and she was Catholic. She was raised Catholic. And she was very accepting about that and we’re still best friends actually.

So when I came out to another friend, he was a little less open to that, and he basically finally said, “Well, I’m really sorry but I can’t be your friend anymore.” So that made me a little more cautious with who I came out to. I was a little hurt by that so I kind of like held off from coming out to other people.

While Ian eventually opened up and became more comfortable revealing his sexual orientation to others, the initial experience of having a friend reject him because of
religion made him more cautious about telling others, particularly devout, religious individuals, about his sexual orientation.

For these students, religion was either a reason to not form a relationship or else was the reason one ended. Religion was the way in which power was enacted to influence the relationship between student peers. Religion either impeded the formation of possible friendships or else they contributed to breaking down existing relationships. For a majority of the participants, at some point, religion was a consideration when deciding whether or not to reveal their orientation to another. Religion also impacted the nature of any current relationships with friends or family members. For these students, religion, and particularly Christianity/Catholicism, as a discourse created a “sphere of knowledge” for them that Christian or Catholic individuals may be less likely to accept them for their sexual orientation.

For some students, religion remained a major part of their daily lives. Beth was devout and devoted to the Church. Others, like Carrie, Dan, and Howard, were practicing Christians but stopped once they fully understood the stance that Christians had on homosexuality. For them, the religious discourse affected them as they decided to whom they would reveal their sexual orientation to within that discourse. Carrie hid her orientation from her parents because they were devout Catholics, but the church also helped her to reveal her orientation to her sister. Beth hesitated to fully discuss her orientation with her parents and had not revealed her orientation to church members because of its religious doctrine. Religion as a discourse affected the students and influenced if and to whom they disclosed their sexual orientation. The way in which
religion was pervasive in all of these students’ lives made religion a distinct, separate aspect to consider.

Higher Education

Another discourse that was important in these students’ lives was higher education. When navigating the discourse of higher education, the students had to manage numerous parts, including the residence halls, classroom and professors, student organizations, and campus events. For the students, each part had its own set of expectations and beliefs associated with it, meaning the students disclosed their orientation in some area but not the others. The following sections describes each of these parts and some additional factors to consider when examining the discourse of higher education.

The university in this study had been consistently named a GLBT friendly campus by major GLBT publications and organizations (Campus Pride, 2010; Windmeyer, 2006). The university had been praised for having a high number of GLBT student organizations and campus events, and had also been praised for having “a significant number of LGBT and ally faculty and staff” (Windmeyer, 2006). This recognition was particularly important for some of the international students in the study, because it was a major reason they chose to study at this university.

For many of the students, the reputation for being GLBT friendly translated into their actual experience. As Adam stated, “I mean I really like the atmosphere on campus. I mean most people are accepting.” Beth appreciated the relative diversity on campus. She believed that the diversity meant that the campus community would be more open and accepting of self-identified GLB persons. Dan, being in graduate school and with
more life experience, understood the safety being in higher education provided him, and also recognized the liberal attitudes of the campus community, which was why he continued his education. (And also why he would eventually like to obtain a PhD.) However, in spite of the general comfort afforded to them within the environment, the students had to manage different aspects of higher education and within those aspects decide if and when to reveal their sexual orientation to others.

Residence Halls

One aspect of higher education in which the students had to manage their sexual identity was in the residence halls. The undergraduate students in the study had all either lived in or were currently living in the university residence halls. Within the residence halls, the students had numerous interactions with other students. Adam lived in an international residence hall living-learning community, i.e., “for students interested in learning about our world’s many cultures and communities” (quoted from the university website). Adam thought that this community was more open to different sexual orientations than others.

Unlike most of the dorms, there are guys floors and girls floors. I think that is one of the important keys to make the environment for people to come out because if there are only guys there is really pressure. There is really big pressure to be in the closet because you don’t know if they’re gonna accept it or not. It might be a stereotype but like this year, I feel like because I am already openly gay in my hall, I have all this HRC GLBT issues on my door and like jokes so everyone knows that I’m gay but because of that I feel like somebody’s watching me. You
know? Because I’m a minority I don’t want to a stereotypical minority person that other people will think of me even though they don’t know me.

Part of the reason he felt that his residence hall was more open was because of the mix of genders within the hall. Adam had experiences with other men, such as their tendency to speak only about their girlfriends, that compelled him to conceal his sexual orientation from other men. With women also in his hall, he felt less pressure to maintain an assumption of heterosexuality. However, as his comments illustrate, while he felt that his hall was more open and accepting of others, he still felt pressure to maintain a specific demeanor and behavior within it.

On the other hand, Carrie concealed her sexual orientation from those in her residence hall. As she said, “They don’t agree with gay issues and gay rights and stuff like that so I just keep it quiet.” Frances also kept her orientation hidden during her freshman year in the residence hall. As an international student, she just felt that she could not relate to those in her hall.

I find it like hard at first to like adjust to American people in general. Somehow I couldn’t click with them as much. It’s easier with like international students. So back in the dorm, I was just keeping to myself, doing my own stuff.

Because she was an international student, Frances had a difficult time forming supportive relationships with other students. She felt that she could not connect with them because of their cultural differences. This lack of cultural acceptance made her hesitant to reveal her sexual orientation to others in her hall, as she was concerned that revealing her sexual orientation would further inhibit her from forming supportive relationships.

One way in which Adam chose to reveal his sexual orientation was through
different visual symbols. Adam had a Human Rights Campaign (HRC) sticker on his
doors, displayed a National Coming Out Day ad on his door, and had positive GLB related
jokes posted on his door. These were ways for him to be open about his sexual
orientation without having to directly tell each person. On the other hand, students like
Beth decided not to bring these symbols with them to college. As Beth said,

I mean at home I have stuff. I have shirts, and I have posters, but I didn’t bring
them here just because I didn’t know how my roommate would react. So, I guess
at home I’m more open if anything. But not here, for now. Cause I don’t want her
to know yet I guess. I’m not gonna openly put everything like out there, I guess.

Beth did not want to deal with questions that would arise if she brought these materials
with her to college. As a result, Beth had not told her roommate about her sexual
orientation. As she described,

I didn’t tell my roommate yet. She’s from a very well a very small town. I think
it’s in the south, like Kenton [pseudonym used]. I don’t where you’re from or if
you’re familiar but basically it gives me the impression that she would like against
it. And there’s… I don’t have a girlfriend now so there’s no reason to be like “hey
this is my friend whose like staying over.” So I guess if anything happens at that
time, I’ll confront it but and we’re not super close so I don’t see any huge reason
to tell her right now.

The students’ willingness to reveal their orientation within the residence hall depended on
their perceptions of others and how they perceived hallmates would accept their sexual
orientation. Frances had a difficult time forming meaningful personal relationships in the
residence halls, and thus kept her orientation to herself. Carrie and Beth believed that
their roommates or other hall residents would not be fully accepting and rather than deal with the consequences, chose to keep their orientation concealed. On the other hand, Adam thought that his hall was open-minded and was therefore comfortable publically displaying symbols representing his gay identity.

In deciding whether to disclose their sexual orientation, the students were exerting power in their own way. Beth did not want to disrupt the relationship with her roommate and wanted to maintain the power dynamic between them. If she revealed her orientation to her roommate, then the knowledge produced from this use of power would impact the relationship with her roommate. Carrie had similar feelings about the residents in her hall. On the other hand, in revealing his orientation, Adam was not concerned about disrupting or changing his relationships with other residents. For Adam, the dynamics within the relationships were already in place so revealing his sexual orientation did not significantly impact his life. The difference between Adam’s experience and the other students’ was the time spent in the residence halls. At the time of the interview, Beth and Carrie were in their first quarter at the university. Frances, while a junior, only lived in the residence halls during her first year. Adam, a sophomore, lived in the hall his first year and chose to live in the residence hall his second year. By staying in the hall his second year, Adam was able to establish positive relationships with those in his hall. When he arrived his freshman year, he was “not sure how to come out openly,” because he did not have personal connections with those in his hall. Once he became familiar with the hall and its residents, he became comfortable with those individuals and realized that revealing his orientation would not negatively impact his relationships. Dan, describing his residence hall experience at another university, summarized the impact of
relationships in deciding to reveal his sexual orientation.

I didn’t want to come out to my floor because I couldn’t even come out to myself. I didn’t want negative assumptions to be made about me and again it’s really hard to think back, but I was just scared. I was scared of what they would do, how would they react, if they would reject me. Not realizing that in being a genuine person, I was—in not being a genuine person, I was essentially truncating any kind of meaningful relationship you could have because if I’m trying to approximate what you want me to be and I don’t get it right, well, then we’re even further apart than we started with and if I do, well it doesn’t matter. We’re still not any closer together.

As freshmen, Beth and Carrie likely had that same fear of not knowing how people would react and fear that others would reject them.

The Resident Assistant (RA) also impacted the students’ perceptions of the residence halls. Adam described one incident where the RA became involved after a fellow resident made derogatory comments to him and other gay residents.

I mean those kind of accidents were going on and my RA’s really cool and she’s really nice. She put up some words that you cannot use on this hallway, you know all this discriminating stuff like GLBTs, ethnicity or whatever.

For Adam, having the RA address these incidents made the overall climate in his residence hall open and supportive. The presence and active participation of the RA offset any incidents of discrimination and made Adam comfortable living in that environment.
Dan, a graduate student, had been an RA at his undergraduate institution. Dan described a time when a resident revealed his orientation to other floor members, some of whom did not react positively.

That resident who was gay, his name is Todd [pseudonym used], came to me and was just crying because his friend, Ken [pseudonym used], had said some awful things about gay people and well, as the RA, you know I talked to him about it. The one interaction I’ve had with him (Ken) before was he’s just like “Well, that’s gay.” And I was pinning up a bulletin board and I was like, “Really? That’s gay?” And he was like “That’s not what I meant.” And I was like “I know that’s not what you meant.” And he said, “Uh, but, uh, I.” I was like “No, did I say anything? Am I offended?” And later on, he came up to me and said, “I’m sorry you know. I just didn’t even think about it.” And I said, “That’s okay, but that’s what I’m here for is to help you realize that the words you say can hurt people. I’m fine because I know that wasn’t about me, but so many people you will meet who are not – who are still going through the coming out phase won’t be that secure and they will see that as a personal attack and be hurt.”

As the RA, Dan helped Ken realize the implications behind his statements and overall helped to create a more positive climate within the residence halls.

Through personnel, such as the Resident Assistant, the residence hall environment can impact the students’ overall comfort level within the hall and thus contribute to the students developing positive relationships with others. For Adam, knowing that his RA could be supportive and address any issues that could arise regarding his sexual orientation made him more likely than students such as Beth, Carrie, and Frances to
reveal his orientation other residents. The unique set-up and design of the residence halls made it a discourse that the students in the study managed separately from other aspects of higher education.

*Professors and Classroom*

Beyond the residence halls, the students also considered the classroom and professors when making decisions about revealing their sexual orientation. The classroom experiences for the students in the study varied greatly, and no evidence of any correlation between age and comfort with revealing their sexual orientation to professors existed.

Adam had no problem revealing his orientation to a teaching assistant or professor because he believed that they had training prior to starting at the university.

Because I know that they are trained as faculty like they have this report on GLBT students or something like that… They learn something before they teach and they have this diversity issues and I know they have that training. I know this because [the university] is nominated for that, which means at least officially they are very accepting even though not every students is.

Adam referred to the university being a noted GLBT friendly institution; these reports sited the training faculty received on GLBT issues (Campus Pride, 2010; Windmeyer, 2006). However, a review of the faculty handbook showed that the information provided on GLBT students consisted of three paragraphs. In those paragraphs, instructors were reminded that “it is always at the student's discretion to reveal their sexual identity to their instructor or peers.” (quoted from university faculty/teaching assistant handbook) and that instructors should not make assumptions about any student’s sexual orientation.
Finally, they were warned to avoid using potentially offensive language in the classroom. While these suggestions were useful and important, the information presented did not include the potential implications for not following these suggestions. Also, this section of the handbook did not have a statement about the university’s general commitment to supporting GLBT students. Finally, no mention was made of how to support non-White GLBT students or information on how the non-White GLBT experience might be different from those of White students. Thus, while Adam did feel more comfortable revealing his sexual orientation because of the information in the handbook, further investigation revealed that the information actually provided instructors was minimal at best.

Other students were not comfortable revealing their orientation to professors or in the classroom. Carrie felt that it was difficult to form meaningful relationships with her professors because of the design of her classes. As she described,

The thing with professors is that I can rarely meet them. It’s in large lecture halls. So all these kids are lining up to talk to them. It’s more about school work, and it’s like school work is overwhelming my life. There’s no time for relationships.

Similarly, Frances had a difficult time forming meaningful relationships with classmates because of the design of college classes. As she stated,

Classroom experience, I guess I’m used to small classrooms. In Malaysia, every year, you just get assigned to this classroom, and so you’re in the same classroom with the same people the whole year. It was different from when I came here; it was like every subject is a different class, so it’s harder to like make friends because you only see them for like an hour. And then once you leave class,
you’re never going to see this person again, maybe not again for the next two years you’re going to be at [the university]. So, it’s harder to make friends.

Both Frances and Carrie’s statements showed how the university environment used bio-power and created docile bodies. The large classes with constant turnover made it difficult for students to form any meaningful relationships with professors and/or other classmates. The design of classes subjugated students and in many ways, controlled how students learned and how they formed relationships with others. (I will explore the impact of bio-power in greater detail in Chapter 8.)

Another reason that the students felt they could not disclose their orientation in the classroom or to professors was the subject matter of the course. Several of the students were in either science/engineering or business majors. They felt that these subjects made it difficult for them to disclose because the subject of sexual orientation would not come up in class. For example, as a business major, Frances reported that the issue of sexual orientation did not come up often in her classes, but she did feel comfortable in a psychology class where the professor was a lesbian. Gabby, also in a business major, was concerned that revealing her orientation in class would mean that her classmates would not want to work with her now or in the future.

Well, I mean for example, if you ask me, I mean privately, are you bisexual? I may say yes. But I’m not so sure that if you ask me openly in one class. Because if I say yes, it’s like I say to yes to everybody. But probably there are some people within the class that cannot accept this fact, and they’re gonna think bad of me. They can be my teammates in the future, but if I tell them, they’re probably, in the future, gonna chose other people as teammates.
For Gabby, revealing her orientation in class had implications beyond just the class itself. As a result, she decided to keep it hidden. On the other hand, Ian, in a humanities based program, was open about his sexual orientation in the classroom.

I don’t hide it anymore so I’m pretty open in talking about it. I did a presentation maybe two weeks ago on information seeking habits of undergraduate students and they were like, “Why are you interested in this topic?” and I was like, “Well, because I’m a big gay. I’m a big poof.” And they were like, “Big poof?” And I was like, “I’m a homosexual guy. This big gay guy, okay? If you haven’t noticed, I dress a lot nicer than some of you guys.” And they were like, “Oh.”

Ian was at a point where he did not foresee any significant negative consequences associated with revealing his orientation in class.

Rather than openly disclosing his orientation in class, Adam preferred to be subtle and wear his rainbow bracelet on the first day of class. However, he did have concerns about how people would react upon seeing him wear the bracelet. Furthermore, Adam generally felt out of place and isolated within the classroom, and particularly in his honors classes. While he did not start in the university honors program, he maintained good grades after his first year, applied, and was admitted. He described his honors classroom experience (and specifically his honors English class),

I was really intimidated in honors classroom because like they are very conservative and everything. And the guys always play football and they look like this, and girls are very California and all the stereotypes. I was really intimidated because of that. There were a lot of people who I think of as stereotypical, straight, rich, white people in the society. But I think of course not all of them are
not like that. I mean they don’t hate… And you know like there is some stereotyped rich, white, honors people they are like all this… I know that but especially in my English class. Except for some people I feel like they don’t talk to me and like I am isolated from them. I mean there are three other Asian people but they are American.

His status as an Asian international student differentiated him from the Asian American students in the class. Because, as an international student, English was not his primary language, he felt isolated from others. In turn, he was not comfortable revealing his orientation to others. For Adam, this difference was particularly salient when compared to his residence hall experience. In the residence halls, he did not have feelings of isolation, and was therefore more compelled to reveal his orientation within that setting over the classroom.

Overall, the students did not feel compelled to be open about their sexual orientation within the classroom. For the first-year students, the design of their classes, consisting of large lectures and of multiple, quarter-long classes, made it difficult for them to establish relationships that might compel them reveal their orientation to classmates or professors. For others, the subject of their courses meant that the issue of sexual orientation was not mentioned in class; thus, they did not think it was necessary to bring up their GLB orientation to others. In addition, if they revealed their orientation within the classroom, the students perceived negative consequences, both within and after completion of the class.

Adam’s experience illustrated that a student could be open about his/her sexual orientation within one aspect of higher education and not others. These students had a
more difficult time in the classroom establishing relationships that would make them comfortable revealing their sexual orientation. This difference was what makes the classroom a different discourse that these students needed to consider.

**Student Organization Involvement**

The students’ decisions on revealing their sexual orientation within student organizations varied based on organizational type. In recruiting for this study, I contacted student organization leaders for both Asian/American and GLBT related student organizations. Having worked in the Student Affairs office at the university, I had first-hand knowledge of and experience with the expectations that administrators had for student organizations to offer educational opportunities for its members. To gain entry into the organizations, I offered to present to group members on issues facing either Asian/American GLB students or GLB students of color. Proportionally, I had a greater response from the GLBT student organizations than the Asian/American ones. One Asian/American organization allowed me to come and present, but in my correspondence with the organization’s president, they wanted to make sure that I “would not offend anyone” because of the “very interesting yet sensitive” issue. (personal communication with student leader, October 21, 2009)

Admittedly, I was more nervous about presenting to the Asian/American students organizations, mostly because after conducting my literature review, I knew that GLB issues were generally not discussed in Asian/American circles, and some behavior could be considered homophobic. Unfortunately, some of my anxiety was warranted. While waiting to present to an Asian/American organization, I overheard a conversation
between two students (both who appeared of Asian/American decent). While not verbatim, the conversation proceeded as follows:

Student A: What’s this meeting about?

Student B: We are discussing Asian/American GLB students

Student A: Is that like a BLT sandwich? I came because I thought that there might be free food. I might become gay.

Student B: That’s not a nice thing to say.

Student A left the meeting before it started. Examples such as this illustrated to me the difficulty the Asian/American GLB students had in finding a student organization and members that would be accepting of them for both their ethnicity and their sexual orientation. Of the students recruited for this study, only one had attended an Asian/American student organization meeting; the others came from GLBT organizations.

Involvement in GLBT Student Organizations

At the time of the study, one organization for GLBT students of color existed on campus. Adam, while recruited to the study through other means, was an active member of the organization. While he applauded the existence of the organization, he did feel isolated because he was often the only Asian person in attendance. As he said, in the first meeting, “there were two White, one Asian, me, and one Hispanic, my friend Michael [pseudonym used].” Furthermore, Adam had a difficult time relating to the other members, a majority of which were African American. As he stated, “I don’t understand their jokes, which means their culture.”

I met both Beth and Carrie when presenting to the university’s branch of the
Human Right Campaign (HRC). Because both were concealing their sexual orientation from a majority at the university, I asked why chose to be involved with this particular organization. Beth responded by saying,

It’s cause I wanted to get involved with something like with GLBT and then I went on the website and I was checking different clubs out and that’s the one that appealed to me most… And then HRC, I feel not obligated but I should be involved with something GLBT society… I don’t know if obligated is the right word but um I just feel it’s a part of me. So I should take part in something that deals with it. I guess.

Similarly, Carrie wanted to be involved and also researched various student organizations. She had narrowed her choices between HRC and an organization for bisexual students. She described her decision-making as follows,

And I can’t find [bisexual student organization] anymore so I was like “eh, forget it.” I chose HRC because it’s Human Rights Campaign so I figured not only would there be gay rights but there would probably also other human rights in the equation. So that like concerns my “I want to help people” mentality.

While Carrie assumed that HRC advocated for more than just GLBT rights, a search of their national website shows quite prominently that the organization’s primary purpose is to advocate for GLBT human rights. For both Carrie and Beth, their choice to be involved with a GLBT human rights organization reflected an association between their identity as GLB and political activism. They recognized that as GLB, their sexual orientation was not treated equally by the majority, and their decision to be a part of HRC reflected their own way to address the situation.
Adam, Beth, and Carrie all joined the GLBT student organization because of a desire to feel connected. Adam wanted to be connected to individuals who could understand his experiences as an Asian/American gay male. However, the messages communicated to him (i.e., the discursive norms) within the organization for GLBT students of color left him feeling isolated. Instead of connecting to people, Beth and Carrie wanted to connect with a cause, and thus joined HRC. Beth felt that she should be involved with something directly related to her identity, and Carrie wanted to be involved with an organization that served GLBT and other human rights. The discursive norms communicated to them within the organization left them feeling safe to leave their sexual orientation concealed from the rest of the group; they were not concerned that others could find out about their sexual orientation because of their involvement in HRC. As Carrie stated, “I’m involved, but they think it’s because I am into people.”

Involvement in Asian/American Student Organizations

A different set of discursive norms was evident within the Asian/American student organizations. GLB orientation was never discussed within these groups; thus the students were involved with these organizations for different reasons. I recruited Gabby and Ian while presenting to an Asian/American organization. However, when asked about why they attended the meeting, both indicated that they were asked to attend by one of the leaders, who was a friend. Both did not feel strongly attached to the organization or its mission. The students in the study generally felt a disconnect to Asian/American culture and thus to the Asian/American student organizations. Edward summarized his sentiment when describing his involvement at his undergraduate institution.
It has kind of bothered me, the idea of people bonding over something that they are born into or have no control of. Because it feels that it’s not so much the aspect of what makes you unique but what you are. There was also the reasons why I DIDN’T participate in Chinese Student Association or Taiwanese Student Association early in my [college] career. Cause it’s not because I’m interested in Chinese culture. It’s because I was born into it and there is a lot to be said about the reason why we need it is because of quote unquote solidarity or common culture experiences but at the same time I do feel that there is something, something wacky when it’s not about your personal interests.

Similarly, Adam expressed that he did not feel a connection to the Asian/American community within the university, and thus was not involved with the organizations on campus.

When the students were involved with Asian/American student organizations, they were related to martial arts. Upon starting at the university, getting involved with martial arts was a priority for Edward. He described his decision to get involved.

It’s a cultural thing. And it’s also a spiritual thing for me because I’d say this is also my rant against backlash of conservative Christianity. I think that spirituality is very, very, very important to a person. I mean the whole idea of inner harmony is often neglected. And it’s something I really want to focus on. You can call me maybe new age or (inaudible) person but I’m just gonna say that my people have been practicing this for a few thousand years I’m not new age. (laughter)

Edward admitted to being connected to marital arts culturally but was also connected to the Far Eastern philosophies that grounded the practice. Frances was also involved with
the taekwondo club her first year because it was an activity she had participated in while in Malaysia.

Both Edward and Frances kept their sexual orientation hidden in the martial arts clubs. Their hesitation was likely due to the lack of acceptance regarding GLB identity within the Asian/American community, as many of the club members were other Asian/American students. As Edward stated, “Some of them know and some of them don’t. And it’s kind of awkward sometimes.” Frances kept her orientation hidden from the taekwondo club until two openly gay members surprised her and asked her about her sexual orientation. Overall, the students found it more difficult to be active members of Asian/American student organizations because of a general feeling that these organizations were not as open to GLB individuals being involved.

After attending several Asian/American student organization meetings, I saw first-hand how and why the students felt this way. When attending an organization meeting for Asian Indian students, I was given a handbook provided to all members. In it, the authors listed useful resources for Indian students at the university. The handbook did not contain any resources that could be relevant for GLB Asian Indian students. At that meeting, the organization’s president asked people to introduce themselves and tell others about their interests/hobbies. A lot of them mentioned being interested in movies, dancing, volleyball and cricket and talked about a dance show and club. To me, it had a very heterosexual feel as there was an assumption that they attended these events with opposite-sex partners. From attending this and other meetings, I could understand why the students in the study did not feel comfortable revealing their orientation within this type of setting.
Impact of Student Organization Involvement

The students in the study were understandably more willing to reveal their sexual orientation within GLBT student organizations than within Asian/American student organizations. When viewing these organizations through a discursive lens, the Asian/American student organizations communicated a norm that did not allow for free discussion and acceptance of sexual orientation. Because these discussions were more accepted in the GLBT organizations, the students were more willing to reveal within that particular setting. However, even within the GLBT student organizations, students like Adam felt “out of place” because of the lack of Asian/Americans within the organization. As Boyer (1990) points out, the university has a duty to help and create a just and open community, one that allows students of different race/ethnicity and sexual orientation the freedom to communicate freely without fear of discrimination or backlash. The students, through their participation in these organizations, attempted to find their own just and open community, to varying degrees of success. They desired a community where revealing their orientation to others would be accepted, i.e., be a discursive norm, and thus allow them to be open and free about the sexual orientation. The degree to which they succeeded was what largely impacted their decisions to reveal their orientation within this particular discourse.

Campus Events

Another settings where different norms were communicated were campus events. As part of the study, I attended several campus events around the time of the interviews, mostly to try and recruit participants but also to gain perspective on how these students might seek out friendships and community with others. One event, an open house for the
GLBT community, was an opportunity for students, faculty, and staff to learn more about the various resources and organizations available for them. Another called Fusion Friday, was a monthly Friday night social for GLBT students at the university and two other colleges within the area. On their Facebook page, the purpose of the event was described as the following, ” Fusion Friday is a social space for [area omitted] GLBT college students and their allies. It is a safe space to hang out and meet friends: A place to be.”

Finally, I attended a social at a local gay bar/restaurant for GradQueers, an organization for GLBT graduate students and their allies. The following was a reflection on my attendance of Fusion Friday.

I am very struck with the diversity in the room. I see Black, 2 Asians, White, and a Latino students. I also see that they are of many different ages. It is apparent just looking around the room that some of the students are first year or younger while there are also graduate students… I’m encouraged by the positive vibe in the room. I can tell that this is an environment where they feel truly comfortable being themselves. I can tell that the students do not feel that they need to hold back in any way. I mention to everyone that I meet in the circle that I am doing a study on Asian American GLB students. They seem interested in willing to help me. I encourage them to take a flyer as a way of helping.

My first communication with Adam about participating in this study was at Fusion Friday. I had seen Adam at other non-GLBT focused events, but felt more comfortable approaching him at Fusion Friday.
While I felt that the events helped to create an atmosphere of acceptance, some students had trouble finding ones to attend. Frances spoke about this difficulty when describing the gay community in the state.

I realized [state omitted] is different from California or New York where these communities are larger, more open. And then somehow the gay community in [the university], it’s really like played down low or something. You can never really find them… I try to look at it online to see if they have events. I’ve never like seen any updated events. Most of the ones I’ve seen [were] in the past, like past few years.

Incidentally, a search of “GLBT events” on the university main webpage led me to the Multicultural Center site. While the center was not the only unit that put on GLBT campus events, there was a events calendar link from which one could find upcoming GLBT related campus events.

I also was on several e-mail listservs and Facebook groups (which has a feature that allows for mass communication of e-mail) for Asian/American and GLBT student organizations. Through these lines of communication, the student organization leaders could tell others about upcoming campus events. While the GLBT announcements almost always included statements inviting members to bring friends, the Asian/American student organizations were more factual in their message. For example, for one organization, the end of every e-mail said “See you next week!” or “Hope to see you soon,” personalizing the message for the students and helping them to feel welcome to attend the event. On the other hand, an Asian/American organization would simply end each e-mail with “thanks.” While subtle, these messages communicated a message to
students regarding how they might be accepted at the events. Thus, while Frances reported having difficulty finding events to attend, even when these events were communicated to students, these events often conveyed messages that helped students decide whether or not they felt comfortable to attend. For this study, campus events were one way in which discursive norms were conveyed to students. These norms helped the students decide on whether or not to reveal their sexual orientation.

Country of Origin

The international students in the study had a different perspective on the norms centered around sexual orientation in the United States, mostly because of their experiences in their country of origin. Adam wanted to study in the United States because he believed he could be open to others about his sexual orientation, which he could not do in his home country, South Korea. As he described,

The society, generally I don’t like it because not because it is Asia or something but because the society still is not open about the existence of sexual minorities or the concept of gay and transgender and they don’t even know the differences between them.

He attributed this lack of acceptance in his home country to a social hierarchy, where older people were more revered.

I don’t know if the word hierarchy is the word for that, but there is an order. If you are younger than someone you’re not supposed to say something against them, even though I don’t agree with them. If the older people say something, I will say “oh yeah” but I don’t really agree.
Furthermore, this hierarchy was a major reason why he chose to come to the United States to study.

I mean one of the reasons why I came to the United States was not only to study stuff but also social stuff. I don’t want to be in the closet and the social hierarchy in South Korea and Asia. I can’t really fit in the [South Korean and Asian] society… So I like here because like first of all I don’t have that. Second of all I don’t have to be in the closet, and third like I LOVE to study what I can and what I want to. In Korea, it is really different from here, you go to college but it’s not like you study something in college and you just get a degree. It [the degree] doesn’t mean anything.

Adam’s situation and his choice to attend college in the United States illustrated how Foucauldian power affected Adam’s decision-making. His description of the social hierarchy in South Korea was power being used to create relationships, in this case ones where elders/older people were more revered; thus the lack of acceptance about homosexuality was a reflection of the norms established by these elders. Adam knew that because of this power dynamic, his chances of being completely open about his sexual orientation in South Korea were low. As a result, he decided to leave the South Korean power structure for the one in the United States. While still heterosexist, Adam saw the United States as being more open to different sexual orientations. Thus, for him, the discourse within his country of origin led him to come to the United States and seek out a society that he saw being more accepting of his identity.

Frances, from Malaysia, also felt that the United States was more open about homosexuality. She described her decision to attend.
Well, one of the reasons I chose like U.S. in general is because I was considering U.S. or United Kingdom and I felt that U.S. is kind of more open like with the policy of gay students. So that’s why I chose U.S. and I ended up choosing [the university] because I like sports and it’s a university for sports.

For both Adam and Frances, their decision to study in the United States reflected a decision to change their living environment and space to one where their homosexual identity could exist and be possible. By studying in the United States, they felt more freedom to enact their homosexual identities.

Being from a predominantly Muslim country, Frances knew that it would be unlikely that the country would ever unequivocally recognize and accept the GLBT community. As a result, she envisioned staying in the United States upon graduation and starting a life outside of her country. However, upon further conversation, she revealed that she was open to the possibility of returning to Malaysia and becoming involved with the GLBT community.

Well, I do realize that it’s impossible to get like Malaysians [in Malaysia] to recognize like a gay marriage, but then at the same time, the community there is getting stronger. It’s getting more open, the younger people. So I don’t know, if I go back to Malaysia, I hope to be like more active in the community, and I get to know more people because pretty much my whole life up to now I’ve been like kind of like sheltered, all to myself. Never really like went out there to like look for other people.

Her willingness to return to Malaysia reflected a form of Foucauldian resistance. Frances saw the power regime within Malaysia as constraining in that they did not allow for
freedom to express one’s homosexual identity. By returning to Malaysia and becoming involved with the GLBT community, Frances would attempt to make the dominant discourse acknowledge her existence as a lesbian. Her desire to be involved with the growing community also illustrated her growing acceptance of herself as an Asian lesbian. She was comfortable enough with her sexual identity that she was willing to further her agency within the dominant discourse, i.e., Malaysia.

In addition to feeling that the United States was more open and accepting, Gabby saw the distance between the university and her home/family as a reason to be open about her sexual orientation. She assumed that even if the entire campus knew about her bisexuality, it would never get back to her parents. In addition, both Howard and Gabby, being from China, explained how the heterosexist nature of Chinese culture centered around the expectations that individuals marry and start a family. Because of this focus on marriage and family, Gabby believed that her bisexuality would be more accepted in China because the possibility existed that she would be with a man and start a traditional family. For Howard, the pressure to start a family was so great that he considered marrying a woman so as not to be ostracized by his family and society. In the following, he described the pressure and implications involved,

It’s a particular situation in China. It’s like you’re supposed to get married, right, when you reach a certain age, right? So the gay guys, they feel pressure from family and society to get married. What they do is they have a little something on the side—a boyfriend or sometimes just fool around when his wife is not around. They don’t feel bad about it. Well, I don’t know. No, they don’t feel bad. Like most of them, they think it’s the way to do it. I mean because you can’t change
who you’re attracted to. I mean then you’re married and a lot of times, you have kids.

For all of the international students, being in the United States allowed them to escape the discursive practices within their home country. Their decision to leave was an act of resistance from which their own sexual identity became more of a possibility. Thus, while not revealing their orientation to every individual, these students were more likely in the United States to chose to disclose their sexual orientation to others than if they were in their home country.

The students also envisioned being able to start a new life outside their country of origin after finishing at the university. Upon graduation, Adam wanted to live in Canada or Switzerland.

I realized that I thought about it for so long time that if I were straight I wouldn’t have to. Because if I were straight not Asian, I said Canada because they have gay marriage and their diverse as much as the United States. So I don’t have to worry about being Asian AND gay at the same time. That is the only place that I can live without any worries.

The other students all expressed a desire to stay and work in the United States as they thought that living in the United States would “make life easier” (as stated by Howard). After my formal interview with Gabby, she asked me if she could gain citizenship by marrying a woman in a state where gay marriage was recognized. For these students, the United States offered a reality and discourse that made expression of their sexual orientation more of a possibility. Subsequently, their expectations within their country of origin influenced their choice to study in the United States and be open about their sexual
orientation.

Social Networking Sites

One way in which the students choose to reveal their sexual orientation was through online and social media or social networking sites (SNS). SNS use has been increasingly steadily, especially among younger people and college students (Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010). The most popular of these SNS is currently Facebook, where the number of users has grown from 150 million in early 2009 to nearly 400 million users in early 2010 (Arnold, 2010). This number continues to grow daily.

The use of and information published on social networking sites (SNS), and in this case, Facebook, varied greatly among the students. Some students were open about their sexual orientation on these online profiles. As Brooks (2009) points out, being open about one’s sexual orientation on Facebook “makes one primary but traditionally fraught ritual of gay and lesbian life so much easier” because the burden of finding out about the individual’s orientation is on the friend viewing the profile and not on the actual individual. By having the information in an online profile, a person no longer needs to “come out” to each individual. That person can simply look at the information posted online and determine the other’s sexual orientation.

Overall, the use of online SNS has significantly increased among college students in recent years (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Roblyer et al., 2010). On Facebook, individuals have the opportunity to state who they are interested in, i.e., men or women. Adam, Edward, and Gabby were the only students in the study to utilize the feature and list interests that reflected their actual sexual orientation. Dan and Ian did not use the feature but admitted that they did not intentionally hide their orientation on Facebook. However,
Beth, Frances, and Howard reported that they intentionally excluded information about their sexual orientation on their profiles. (Carrie did not grant permission for me to view her Facebook profile.) I should also note that Dan and Ian admitted to not being prolific users of Facebook, which was why they did not use the feature indicating their “interested in” preference. They reported rarely using it to establish relationships or communicate information to others.

*Disclosing Sexual Orientation Online*

SNS allowed students to establish relationships with others before ever meeting in person. Keeping his sexual orientation online allowed Adam to meet other GLBT students from the university before starting as a freshman. His closest friend actually requested to be a “friend” on Facebook prior to ever meeting him in person. He stated he was “surprised” by the request, but that “she want[ed] to meet other gay people on campus before she [went] to school.” His friend would not have been able to find him without the use of online media. Through features on Facebook, they were able to communicate online before meeting in person. Adam still considered this person his best friend.

Frances first revealed her orientation online (through a Friendster profile, a SNS popular before Facebook) before revealing her orientation in person. She felt, however, that this profile was largely ignored, and thus, as Facebook became popular, she chose not to have information about her sexual orientation on her profile. Edward also believed that others did not look at his sexual orientation within his Facebook profile, so he was comfortable including that information on it. Finally, Gabby thought that having her sexual orientation in her profile was a way for her to meet potential mates.
Being open about one’s sexual orientation can be “radically empowering” experience (Brooks, 2009). For these students, choosing to have their sexual orientation revealed online allowed them to use SNS within three dimensions, the information, friend, and connection dimensions (Bonds-Raacke & Raacke, 2010). Within the information dimension, the SNS allowed the students to share a key piece of information about themselves and their identity. Within the friend dimension, having their sexual orientation online helped them to reveal their orientation to current friends or helped them to connect to old friends who may not have been aware about their sexual orientation. Finally, within the connection dimension, SNS allowed the students to establish friendships and relationships with others.

In choosing to have their orientation revealed in online SNS, the students were utilizing a form of communication that made the existence of their sexual identity possible. They did not see the same constraints within SNS as within other discourses, and were therefore able to occupy the space and took control within SNS in order to reveal their sexual orientation to others. Through the use of SNS, their orientation became a reality to those who visited their profile. Through SNS, the students did not have to individually tell others about their orientation, the act of putting that information in their profile allowed a larger number of people to learn about their sexual orientation. The students used the power structure within SNS as a way to communicate knowledge about their sexual orientation.

*Excluding Sexual Orientation within SNS*

While some of the students wanted others to know about their orientation through SNS, another group of students wanted to keep the information concealed. These students
were primarily concerned that people who they did not want to find out would discover their orientation through their profiles. As Beth stated, “Randomly it’s just I don’t really need it out there yet.” Howard was concerned that his Chinese friends, who he believed would not be accepting of his orientation, would find out through Facebook. Frances did not want the SNS community to learn about her orientation, and thus kept it concealed online.

In choosing to keep their orientation hidden on their SNS, these students were exercising a form of Foucauldian power. They used SNS as a way to control the dissemination of knowledge, in particular knowledge about their sexual orientation. They wanted to establish personal relationships on their own terms, and by putting their sexual orientation on SNS, they were giving up that control. While within other discourses, people knew about these individual’s sexual orientation, Beth, Frances, and Howard chose to keep it concealed within SNS. In this case, they used SNS for the connection dimension and wanted to connect with others. However, they were choosing to wait to reveal their sexual orientation to those individuals on their own terms.

All of the students with SNS profiles used power as a way to control how knowledge about their sexual orientation was communicated. Some saw SNS as a easy and liberating way of communicating their sexual orientation. For them, SNS fell outside of the constraints of other discourses, and therefore was a way for them to tell others about their orientation. On the other hand, others saw SNS as too open, with potential negative consequences if too many people found out about their sexual orientation. In either scenario, the students’ point of view and opinions about SNS influenced their decisions about revealing their sexual orientation. In turn, they used Foucauldian power
to control exactly how that information (or lack thereof) was communicated through the SNS.

_Discovering People’s Sexual Orientation through SNS_

Regardless of how their sexual orientation was communicated within SNS, most students admitted to looking at other’s profiles to find out their sexual orientation. Frances, whose own orientation was concealed on Facebook, confessed to looking at other’s Facebook profiles when she would be interested in a possible romantic relationship. As she described,

_Most of the time when I’m interested in that person, maybe I just go to Facebook try to find some stuff about them. To see if they put what they’re looking for, if there’s something stated there or not. It’s like a big tell sometimes_

Edward, who was open about his sexuality on SNS, also admitted to looking at other’s profiles to find out about their sexual orientation. Even though the students may have had different feelings about revealing their own orientation through SNS, they still felt that they could use it to find out about others. As Bonds-Raake and Raake (2010) explain, individuals seek gratification when using SNS along the three dimensions. By seeking out information on others, the students were seeking gratification along the connection dimension and looking for information that would allow them to connect with and establish relationships with others.

The students who prolifically used SNS navigated it as a discourse separate from the those discourses based on in-person communication. Because of the potential for many individuals to view their profiles, some students did not want their orientation to be revealed online. Others saw it as a way for them to establish relationships with other GLB
individuals. In today’s virtual world, face-to-face contact is not necessary to establish connections and relationships, which made SNS an important aspect of this study.

Conclusion

The discourses singled out for this study, home life, higher education, country of origin, religion and SNS, all had belief systems in place that differed from each other and forced the students to navigate their sexual orientation differently within each. The individuals within these discourses had different expectations on how one should enact or perform their sexuality. For example, some parents set the expectation that they wanted their children to marry and have children, i.e., a heterosexual performance of sexuality. This expectation was what kept some students in this study from fully revealing their sexual orientation to their parents. In these cases, the students were content, at least at that moment, letting their parents assume that they were heterosexual. They used the power relationship with their parents to help establish this assumption of heterosexuality as part of the knowledge regime. Within some student organizations, these same students felt more comfortable revealing their sexual orientation because they knew that the organization had values accepting of their sexual identity. These organizations did not have the expectations that they act or be heterosexual. Without that expectation, these students felt more freedom to reveal their true sexual identity.

By either revealing or concealing their sexual orientation within these discourses, the students utilized Foucauldian power in order to establish relationships and establish knowledge associated with their sexual identity. By revealing their orientation, they were establishing their homosexual identity as part of the knowledge regime within the particular discourse. By concealing it, they chose not to include that information. In the
next chapter, I examine the impact of these decisions and the impact that including (or excluding) this knowledge about their sexual orientation had on both their ethnic and sexual self-identities.
Chapter 7: Impact of Disclosure/Concealment on Self-Identity

Introduction

When considering the impact of each of the discourses and their related discursive practices on a Foucauldian subject, one must consider the degree to which the subject can enact agency within the discourse itself. The students in this study had multiple discourses to navigate; individuals within these discourses helped to communicate its expectations and norms. Because of their social group membership as Asian/American and GLB, the students already fell outside of the discursive norms of White and heterosexual. As a result, the students were all Foucauldian agents to some degree. In other words, in exploring their self-identity, the students had opportunities to further explore their understanding of themselves outside of these discourses, while still existing within it.

In making decisions on when and to whom to reveal their sexual orientation, the students explored both their sexual and ethnic identities. These decisions regarding disclosure or concealment of sexual orientation was a discursive practice that allowed the students to shape and reshape their subjectivity; these decisions also allowed them to further enact their given agency. In the following sections, I analyze through a Foucauldian lens how the students came to be aware of themselves as Asian/American GLB individuals.

Impact on Ethnic Identity

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For the students, relationships formed after deciding to reveal or conceal their sexual orientation impacted their understanding of their ethnic identity in different ways. Some of the students felt that because they need to understand their emerging GLB identity, their development of their Asian/American identity was delayed. This delay was the case for Dan. When referring to his undergraduate experience, he described,

Finding that sense of self, dealing with coming out issues, dealing with the racial identity piece, which really didn’t integrate until I was 18 because I grew up in a town of 1,000 people where it was where your family mattered, not what you look like, and I had a good family, so people just treated me as [Dan].

So it took me a long time to realize that when I’m in a crowd, especially in [a Midwest university], which is only, what? 9.4% minority. I look different than most people around me. And that was a shocking realization, and … so I joined Asian-American Student Union, and I was actually a student senator for a semester, and tried on the role of seeing how that fit. And for me it just really didn’t fit because it wasn’t how I was raised. You know they were talking about a lot of issues about visiting home. I had been to Taiwan once to see my grandparents between my senior year of my high school and freshman year of college. So I’d been there and visited and it was neat, but to me it was very, this is not what I feel is like home.

Dan did not have the opportunity to explore his ethnic identity growing up because he never realized through his relationships with others that his ethnic identity was anything other than White. As he transitioned from home life being a primary discourse to higher education, that changed, and he utilized the resources within higher education to explore
this aspect of his identity. Dan utilized the power relationships within both his home life and higher education in order to develop an idea of how others perceived him and develop how he viewed himself within those discourses. Because he grew up in a predominantly White environment, surrounded by what he viewed as White cultural values, Dan ultimately came through that process seeing himself as White, even though he understood that others saw him physically as Asian/American. Therefore, in Dan’s case, power and the relationships helped him to develop an ethnic identity that was different from his physical appearance.

Beth, who was adopted by White parents, felt a connection to her Asian/American identity and wanted to explore it further; however, she did not have the opportunity to form the relationships that would allow her to do so. For her, the relationship she wanted to form was with her birth parents. She talked about wanting to explore her Korean background.

I mean when we were younger we went to meetings for other adopted children. And then we took classes because my brother and I are both adopted. So, we took Korean classes, but I stopped. And I want to go back and see if I can like find my parents. But something like I had to wait until I was 18 to access all that info. So, I haven’t really had a chance to. But yeah, I do feel a connection. And like I said, I want to go back.

Beth, who was younger than Dan and was only a few weeks into her college career, simply had not formed interactions with others that allowed her to develop her ethnic identity.

Edward, while born in the United States, did not consider himself to be Asian
American. When asked to explain why, he said,

I’ve been to lots of places, and I know people from different countries. I feel comfortable with them and when I see like the close-mindedness of… I mean not to say that all American are close-minded cause they’re not. But when I see people who don’t travel and being more close-minded it does bother me. So, I can’t see myself as a local [American].

Edward had traveled abroad extensively between his undergraduate and graduate school experiences. During that time, he developed close relationships with people in those countries, and thus did not think of himself as Asian American.

Ian admitted that it was difficult for him to develop his Asian/American identity because he did not have relationships that promoted that kind of development. As he described,

I think that the Asian identity was difficult for me to, maybe it still is difficult for me to understand, mainly because I didn’t have a network within the Asian community in [area omitted]. My parents were kind of separated out from that and that may have been by choice. I don’t know if they got disenfranchised with a community leader and just decided to stay away but they really weren’t a part of that community.

In addition, as with Dan, Ian admitted that learning about his Asian/American identity was not a priority while in high school because he was learning about his emerging homosexuality. As he described,

I was the only Asian male in my high school that I didn’t even think about the Asian identity part for me. It was near the end of high school, concerned about the
homosexual identity I was struggling with at that time. So it was a little more
difficult for me.

Because forming meaningful relationships within the Asian/American community was not
a priority, Ian believed that his Asian/American identity did not affect his experiences
revealing his orientation to others. As he stated, “So I didn’t even have a basis to go left,
to feel like I’m separating myself from the Asian community by coming out.” Now that
he is more comfortable with his sexual identity, he admits to feeling connected to his
Asian/American heritage. As he joked, “I mean I’ve started doing more of that Chinese
Culture Connection even though I’m not Chinese.”

As these examples illustrate, students prioritized addressing the formation of their
ethnic selves in different ways. These priorities were largely dictated by the discourses
and the expectations associated with those discourses. Dan admitted that when he was at
home and the home life was his primary discourse, he made key decisions about
revealing his sexual orientation that helped him to develop an understanding of his
emerging subjectivity as a sexual being. When he transitioned to college and as higher
education discourse became a priority, he began to address his ethnic orientation and
realized that he was considered different. For Beth, her home life discourse tried to help
her explore her Asian/American background (by making her and her brother attend
Korean adoptee classes), but to more deeply explore her ethnic background and thus her
ethnic identity, she needed to be older and have the resources to find her birth parents.
During the interview, Beth admitted to me that this was simply not a priority for her at
the moment since she just started college. Edward, after his undergraduate experience,
traveled internationally for nearly one year. During that time, he established relationships
with others that helped him to explore an ethnic identity. Through his travels, he was
surrounded by discourses dictated by the countries where he traveled. Finally, Ian’s home
life discourse did not allow him to form meaningful relationships with other
Asian/American individuals. As a result, he never felt a connection to his
Asian/American background and thus never felt that being both gay and Asian/American
significantly impacted him.

Overall, in spite of coming from a variety of backgrounds and experiences,
including, different countries, regions within the U.S., and biracial parents, the
participants all knew that they physically appeared to be Asian/American. The discourses
for these students dictated if and how the students explored their physical difference as
Asian/American, because within each discourse, the students could surround themselves
with individuals who could either support or preclude them from exploring their ethnic
heritage. Their decisions about revealing their sexual orientation also impacted when and
how they explored their ethnic identity as decisions about their sexual orientation often
took priority over exploration of their ethnic selves.

All of the students acknowledged that others considered them to be an ethnic
minority (hence their agreement to participate in the study). However, in a Foucauldian
sense, discourse and power, along with the relationships created through power, impacted
the degree to which they understood themselves as an ethnic “other” and reflected their
subjectivity and different subject positions within that environment. For example, Dan
came to college not fully realizing that others saw him as Asian. Once faced with that
reality, he ultimately acknowledged that others saw him as an Asian “other” but
continued to identify as White. Thus, through his exploration of his ethnic identity, Dan
was able to position himself as that type of subject within the college environment. Through the power dynamics and relationships formed through power, the students were able to evolve their own understanding of themselves as ethnic individuals and ultimately acted out that identity within that environment.

**Impact on Sexual Identity**

To varying degrees, the students also came to different understandings of themselves as sexual beings, and thus had different subject positions in relationship to their sexual identity. Within the home life and/or within their country of origin, many of the students were expected to keep their orientation hidden. Thus, starting college and entering into higher education was the first significant opportunity for them to express their sexual orientation and the first opportunity for them to reveal their orientation to others. Ian’s transition to college was particularly reflective of how transition to college could improve one’s comfort level with his sexual identity. As he explained,

I didn’t really feel quite comfortable until maybe I was twenty. So I would say a period of three to four years where I was not comfortable with the idea of being gay, I would say. It actually wasn’t until I was at [the university] where I met people that I was in no way or form sexually attracted to but were gay as well that I can talk to that I felt okay about that, even without dating any one of them.

Gabby also understood that it was a process for her to understand her sexual orientation. For Gabby, as she met and formed relationships with both men and women while in high school, she began to see herself as bisexual.

I told you that, that friend, she actually had a boyfriend before, but after a while, she decided that she’s a lesbian. I think it’s requires like a process for you to
determine your sex, your sexual orientation. For me, I think it’s during that time, I think it’s. I feel very comfortable to stay with one sex but no matter women or men.

She continued forming this identity as she managed relationships with both genders, but in China she could not reveal her sexual orientation to those outside of the relationships. Once she started college in Italy and then the United States, she felt free to openly express her orientation and also felt more comfortable with her bisexuality. She believed that because she was bisexual her orientation would be more accepted by society, by both U.S. and Chinese society, than someone who was gay or lesbian. When asked why, she explained,

If you’re a lesbian, it is like you convert from one direction to the other one. But if you’re bisexual. It’s just like you expand your directions. You know what I mean? So, I think a lot of people, they’re thinking that way, so they kind of accept bisexuality. If you’re a little bit different it’s less a mess.

In Gabby’s eyes, bisexuality was still a part of the heterosexual norm and was not something defined against it. Her view of bisexuality was different from Edward’s, who described his identity as “bisexual erasure.” Edward felt that bisexuality was not accepted by society, and as a result, he did not think that he and his identity really “fit” into any social norm. In his words, “in the current construct it is very much you’re either gay or you’re not. And when you are. You don’t change.” His belief that bisexuality was not accepted by society likely delayed his understanding of himself as bisexual. As he said,

I guess you could say it was sometime in adolescence/high school. I wasn’t really ready to come out to myself until after high school, like the summer after I
graduated. And then after that I thought to myself well maybe I am just gay. And then the summer after my sophomore year. I was like wait a minute something’s off here. (laughter)

Gabby and Edward’s views on how bisexuality was accepted reflects the impact different discursive perspectives and gender differences can have on identity formation and understanding of the individual as a Foucauldian subject. Gabby believed that society generally accepted bisexuality. Therefore, when she began to have romantic feelings for both genders, she did not hesitate to embrace and accept both as part of her sexual identity. Gabby believed that a bisexual identity was part of the discursive norm, and thus did not foresee any difficulty emerging as a Foucauldian subject within those norms. On the other hand, Edward did not believe that society would be accepting of his bisexuality. He believed that society would think of bisexuality as falling outside of heterosexual norms. Subsequently, once he began to have feelings for both genders, he at first thought he was gay, and later came to realize and understand himself as bisexual. Edward’s attitudes were consistent with research that has shown that bisexual men believe that they are invisible with society, as compared to bisexual women (Steinman, 2001; Steinman & Beemyn, 2001). Bisexual men also generally find less acceptance within the heterosexual community (Eliason, 2001), which may also account for Edward’s point of view. Gabby and Edward’s experiences, in learning about their bisexuality, illustrate how individuals can emerge as Foucauldian subjects in different ways.

Carrie had one particular friend that aided her understanding about her attraction to different genders. As she described,

I guess it started with my friend who is she’s studying pre-med. I talked to her
about this and she was like “when kids are a little, they’re all pretty much gay.” And I was like “yeah, I guess so.” So yeah, I started liking girls when I was very, very young. And I got older, and I started liking guys too, and then as you get older, you see more different kinds of people like transgenders. People who like want to be male but they’re female or totally different gender spectrums. I was like “oh yeah, that’s just them, being you know them.” I thought really hard about it and I was like yeah, gender wouldn’t really matter.

For both Carrie and Ian, their friends helped them to develop a comfort level with themselves and their sexual orientation. Besides Ian’s friends in college, he also had a gay high school friend (who remained his friend through college) with whom he frequented gay clubs and bars. This friend helped him to navigate the gay social world and allowed Ian to develop an understanding of how he fit within that network. Ian’s relationship with his high school friend illustrated how power created a dynamic that led to Ian emerging as a Foucauldian subject. Through this power relationship, Ian was able to define himself both within and outside the constraints of the gay social network, thus becoming a stronger Foucauldian agent.

One way in which the students operated as agents within a discourse was evidenced by the students’ involvement within higher education. Beth wanted to be involved with a GLBT organization because of a desire to do something that she felt was “a part of” her. She was involved with the Human Rights Campaign, a group known for its public advocacy of GLBT rights and issues. When asked about being an advocate within the organization, she replied, “I’m not at the point yet where I just want to stand outside of campus and openly proclaim how I’m gay and stuff. I guess I’m not
comfortable with it yet.” Beth desired to be a part of an GLBT organization, but at the same time her hesitancy in advocating for GLBT rights reflected her struggle to enact a higher degree of agency within the higher education discourse. While she was comfortable being a member of the organization that advocated for GLBT rights, she was not comfortable being an active and public advocate for all GLBT individuals.

Within certain parts of the college environment, Adam felt safe and free to express and explore his sexual identity. In the following, he explained how he felt attending Fusion Fridays.

As I said we don’t have to worry, I mean I don’t have to worry about listeners’ taste, tastes of the topic. You know? Just being myself can be so easy there. That is some advantage that I can get being there. I said heterosexual people would never ever feel that obligation or pressure that I would have so I feel relieved there. I mean the sort of relief that I feel in Fusion Friday, they [meaning heterosexuals] would never understand that because like it doesn’t matter to them. That for me. It is important because I CAN be myself. It’s you know (voice softens) like confident?

Within an environment like Fusion Friday, Adam was comfortable behaving in a way that allowed him to express his sexual identity. Within this environment, he was comfortable resisting the constraints of the heterosexual majority, existing as a gay Asian/American male, and therefore being a Foucauldian agent.

These examples illustrate the importance of space in acting out agency and emerging as a Foucauldian subject. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977a) describes the concept of the panopticon. Based on a concept of a prison system, the panopticon is
the idea that prisoners are constantly being watched by guards; however the prisoners do not know exactly how and when they are being watched. Because they are unsure of exactly when and how others see them, the prisoners’ behavior is dictated by the expectations they believe that the guards have of them. In the example of the panopticon, the prisoners occupy a physical space, i.e, the prison; their behavior is dictated by the physical space and the expectations that they believe others have of them within that space. For Beth and Adam, the Human Rights Campaign meeting and Fusion Friday were both examples of physical spaces where they felt the expectations were such that they could be agents and be open about their sexual identity. While never explicitly being told what the expectations were within that setting, they knew that because they were within that space, they were free to enact their GLB selves. Overall, they were still operating within a heterosexist society, but within those smaller physical spaces, they felt more free to fully realize their homosexual identity.

In enacting their agency within these environments, the students developed a comfort level with themselves as GLB individuals. This was best illustrated by Dan. In describing his comfort level with his gay identity, he said,

For me, being gay, it’s a different experience. I am sexually attracted to men. And as much as I have EXTREMELY loving relationships, companion-based relationships with women, they just lack that sexual attraction. And it’s something I feel I was born with.

It was a couple of years ago. I really did like this very effeminate man and it made me question a lot of my own notions on masculinity and how I talked about emotions and, and realizing that masculine-feminine gender constructs are
completely, COMPLETELY separate from sexuality. I’ve never really understood that before. But I realized that because gay gave me that affiliation to cling to and that understanding, it’s something that even though I personally defy and have to carve out my meaning of the word with people I interact with, it’s still something I’m very comfortable with.

Dan’s notion and understanding of his sexual identity had evolved as his agency has evolved. At first, because of his sexual attraction to men and “compassion-based relationships” with women, he began to see himself as gay. As he began relationships with different men, his comfort level with his gay identity improved and his understanding of the construct of gay evolved. Dan was better able to define himself because of those relationships.

Foucault believed that individuals could not obtain true autonomy, and that only agency was possible (Bevir, 1999; Foucault, 1977a, 1978). As resistance within any discourse is inevitable (at least according to Foucault), agency is also inherent within discourses; individuals need the constraints associated with discursive expectations in order to enact any degree of agency. For these students, agency meant that they had to learn to define themselves and their ethnic/sexual identity within various discourses. Some discourses had greater impact than others in helping the students achieve agency in terms of their sexual orientation (e.g., Adam’s feelings when attending Fusion Friday).

The students also struggled to enact their agency within these discourses. One way in which they communicated their struggle was through SNS. Adam in particular utilized this form of communication. On Facebook, people can post “status” updates, which can tell their friends or the general public what they are doing or thinking. Several
months after my interview, Adam began to post status updates expressing his frustration regarding his sexual identity and his treatment by others. Some examples of these updates are as follows. (I should note that Adam was referring to himself in the third person with these statements.)

    People must put themselves into the extreme minority situation at least once in their lifetimes to know what is okay to say and what is not.
    
    So tired of himself getting angry, mad and sad. He also feels very bad for making someone else feel bad everyday. He doesn’t know what to do. He feels miserable and frustrated every day. He hates himself so much nowadays. Worst thing is he can’t say anything about how he feels to anyone… I hope he gets better… hopefully…
    
    Left his class early because he couldn’t stand the overwhelming sadness, and came back home and cried for half an hour. I fell asleep for about 5 hours. When I woke up, I realized that I am the one who should make me feel happy, not someone else. I was looking for someone else who make me feel happy. I was wrong. I feel much better now.
    
    I just want to disappear from the world…. Why is it so hard and difficult? Why am I gay? Why do I have to go through this shitty stuff that other people don’t even imagine in their lives?

As Adam’s statements illustrate, achieving a degree of agency within any discourse can lead to great internal struggle and feelings of sadness and depression. SNS was Adam’s way of communicating to others how he felt.

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This struggle to behave as agents and be empowered within any discourse was further complicated by having to manage stereotypes associated with the students’ Asian/American ethnicity. Adam was keenly aware of this issue. As he stated,

I thought about it for long time and I didn’t know that it was disadvantage for me to think about, but I just realized that if I were straight and White I would never ever think about that. I wouldn’t have to care about going to Russia because of like the skinhead. I don’t have to worry about being Asian in Europe because they don’t like immigrants. I don’t have to worry about being in South Korea because I would perfectly fit in the social norm. I don’t really have to worry about being here because I will be White and will not be gay. I will just hang out with other people. But today I realized that it is something that I have to take care of throughout my life and straight people and White people would never ever seriously think about. I never thought that it was really bad thing and I don’t still.

While Adam struggled with different emotions associated with his identity as gay and Asian/American, he ended his statement by stating, “I never thought it was really a bad thing.” Thus, in spite of his struggle to define himself and enact agency within any discourse, he still retained a sense of pride about his identity. For Adam, one of the biggest reasons he was openly gay was because he was Asian/American.

I try to be openly gay because I was Asian. Because like most people don’t think that especially it was like because it is my floor, I mean my floor is International Housing. There are a lot of international students like from Korea and from China and most Korean people don’t think that there is any gay guys any place in the country or something. That’s why I was like okay here I am. There’s gay guy
from South Korea so I hope you guys please understand that there is some who is gay no matter what their nationalities are… I am concerned about what [they] will think of me because I’m gay and what [they] will think what will they think of me because I’m gay because I’m Asian.

Adam’s ethnic identity empowered him to be openly gay. He wanted to create awareness among others, and particularly among other Asian international students, that the gay Asian/American identity did exist, and that he was one of them. Because of that intersection between his Asian/American and gay identity, he also wanted to downplay and minimize any stereotypes of Asian/Americans. As he said, “I try not to use chopsticks as much as I could.” His desire to be openly gay because of his ethnicity can be considered an act of Foucauldian resistance. As Foucault states, resistance by subjects is inevitable within any discourse. By proclaiming his gay identity and outwardly disclosing it to others, he was outwardly resisting the hegemonic discourse’s vision of gay, Asian/American men (or in some cases, creating the vision and making the hegemony realize his existence).

In resisting the dominant discourse, the students also faced rejection from others. Interestingly, this rejection was not only from those from the majority, i.e., White, heterosexual, but also from those within the gay community. This rejection was particularly salient for Howard, who had difficulty forming romantic attachments because he was Asian/American.

When I first came here and I was the stereotypical skinny Asian and I still am (laughter by Howard). When you talk to people and then they reject you, it’s really weird. So I talk to people, right? Well, actually he talked to me, he started
talking to me online and then the moment he found out that I’m Asian, he’s gone… And I was really hurt. I mean things like that happen, or I talk to a guy, I was like how are you, what are you looking for here, right? He would say something like nothing with an Asian. So I was like, oh my God. So through like interactions with people like that, I mean your self-image plummeted because people are saying you’re unattractive because you’re Asian.

Still, if they turn me down just because I’m Asian, I feel hurt even though I know I should not be bothered by that, but it still happens. Because self-confidence, yeah, but I think a lot of times like self-confidence is based on the feedback from others. If everyone tells you you’re ugly and then you probably will think the same. So that’s something that I’m probably still struggling with.

But I think I’m in a much better position right now.

These experiences illustrate how his Asian/American identity did not fall into the hegemonic standards of the White, gay community. These potential partners had certain expectations of masculinity in their potential partners. When they discovered that Howard was Asian/American, he immediately fell short of those standards, due in part to the previously mentioned stereotypes associated with Asian/American masculinity (Espiritu, 2008; Shah, 2001). Howard’s act of seeking out romantic relationships (in the above example, he referred to online dating) was an act of resistance against the White, gay hegemony. In carrying out this act, he was met with resistance by others; individuals rejected him because he was Asian/American. Because power cannot exist without resistance, the resistance by both Howard and his partners was inevitable. In this case, the relationship between Howard and his partners was created in a Foucauldian power
dynamic. The potential partners had most of the power because they decided when to terminate the relationship. As a result of this power dynamic, Howard’s self-esteem was affected. He admittedly lacked self-confidence looking for his own agency while fighting the expectations of the White, gay hegemony.

Within the heterosexual, White community, the students often did not face the same type of rejection because of their ethnicity. One possible reason for this lack of rejection was the disconnect some students, e.g., Beth, had between their ethnicity and their GLB identity. While research has shown that ethnic minority GLB individuals must often manage a “double minority” status, some of the students managed each minority status separately, as one did not appear to impact the others. Beth, when asked if people questioned her as an Asian/American lesbian, stated, “I mean not about a minority within a minority no. I think it’s just like whether or not I’m gay or straight. I don’t think they look at it if I’m White, Black, or Asian or anything like that.” For Carrie, the disconnect between her ethnicity and sexual orientation affected her decision to keep her orientation hidden from most of her friends. In describing her friendship circle and their reaction if she told them her sexual orientation, she said,

We really label each other. You know Oreo, black on the outside, white on the inside. I get the Twinkie term. That’s yellow on the outside, white on the inside. And then if I told them my sexual orientation that would just probably like blow out the roof.

Her friends already related to her because of her ethnicity. Carrie thought that her friends could not handle finding out about her sexual orientation. This information would force her friends to think of her as both Asian/American and GLB, and she believed that they
would react negatively if they found out. Carrie’s reaction reflected a sentiment that the White, heterosexual (and also to some extent, White, gay) majority does not see the existence of Asian/American GLB individuals. In deciding to keep her orientation concealed from her friends, she was furthering that belief of Asian/American GLB nonexistence. By keeping her sexual orientation hidden, Carrie was also not acknowledging her own Asian/American GLB identity to herself. The White majority, the one that did not acknowledge the existence of the Asian/American GLB identity was thus inhibiting her development of an integrated Asian/American GLB self.

This lack of acknowledgement of Asian/American GLB individuals by the White majority could be attributed to the previously mentioned model minority myth. Asian/American individuals are often considered the “ideal” minority because of relative success within White society. The possibility that Asian/Americans could be GLB breaks this mold of the “ideal” minority, something that the White majority was unwilling to do for these students. In many ways, these students were victims of advanced marginalization. As Asian/Americans, they were considered a part of an “ideal” ethnic group, one whose relative success should be praised when compared to other minorities. The possibility that they could also be gay, lesbian, or bisexual would disrupt any ideal vision that the White majority had, and as a result, the White majority had refused to acknowledge their existence as Asian/American GLB youth.

In spite of this advanced marginalization, some of the students were able to explore and fully integrate both their ethnicity and sexual orientation. For Dan, being in higher education and a counseling major aided in his understanding of himself as an Asian/American gay male.
I think, because I went to counseling and undergraduate for four years, really getting out of that dichotomous thinking helped me to realize how I see others and interact with them. I guess in terms of core self, I can say that I am good at that. I am not good at that. I am willing to try that. I am not willing to try that, and then the body image piece, especially one being half Asian and looking different from the majority of people around me… I actually looked back and realized that that is one of the core reasons I can empathize with people. And it’s really interesting when I talk about being othered. Because until that point, even though I’m racially diverse, I hadn’t admitted to myself that I was different.

On the other hand, Ian admitted that he had to develop his Asian/American and gay identity separately, mostly because his home life did not promote the development of his Asian/American identity.

There weren’t many Asians for me to connect with to begin with; the Asian identity wasn’t as in place. I was isolated for sure because there were very few people I could connect with outside of my family so it was something that was a little more precarious. It was more of a separation of not the ethnic parts so much as the heterosexual network and the homosexual network, developing a new network entirely and then later integrating the two.

Growing up, Ian’s exposure to different environments and discourses was limited. He was primarily confined to his home life and others in the Midwest. Considering the relative lack of Asian/Americans in this region of the country (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), his inability to find other Asian/Americans to connect with seemed reasonable. After he started college, he began the process of navigating different discourses;
eventually, Ian was able to form what he termed a “network” that integrated all aspects of his identity. When asked if he felt if his racial and ethnic identity were integrated, he stated, ”I think so. I’m more relaxed and calm, not stressed out about it. They either like me or they don’t like me. If they don’t like me, whatever. You know?” Through developing relationships and navigating these discourses, Ian developed a comfort level with his gay Asian/American self.

By choosing to reveal their sexual orientation, the students emerged through the constraints of the dominant discourse as Foucauldian subjects. In revealing their sexual orientation, they were engaging in acts of resistance and in turn acting out agency given to them by the dominant discourse. In doing so, they materialized as Foucauldian subjects. The act of revealing their orientation forced those within the majority to acknowledge the existence of the Asian/American GLB identity and in turn made their existence in the world possible.

Other Issues Related to Self-Identity

In creating themselves as Foucauldian subjects, and particularly Asian/American GLB individuals, the students also had to manage numerous stereotypes associated with identifying as Asian/American and/or GLB. Because Adam wanted others to see and acknowledge himself individually as an Asian/American gay male, he wanted to defy any stereotypes associated with being either Asian/American or gay. In some of his personal essays, he wrote about these feelings. Some excerpts are as follows,

People have a tendency to define someone in their languages or visions. The definitions are called stereotypes. I am the very person who is the victim of them, who does not want to be the epitome of them, and who wants to break all
the expectations people have of me.

This is who I am. I am not an Asian gay boy whose name is [Adam], but I am [Adam] who has many features that people will find out when they get to know me. I am [Adam]. I have many stories, ideas, and life experiences. No one can define me with any language, including myself.

I am a boy who likes to hang around with other people. I do not wear fancy clothes all the time. It bothers me if I wear them often. My favorite color is not purple. I do not like the color at all. I do not like all the males on earth. I do not hit on somebody that I have never met before. I do not cross-dress. Wearing a rainbow bracelet does not mean that people must be cautious about me. It means I am proud to be who I am.

My skin color is a little bit different from others, but that does not mean that I am good at math. To tell the truth, I hate math. I do not like science courses at all. I do not speak a tonal language. I do not know all the Asian people on campus. I have never heard of fortune cookies until I came to the United States. Therefore, in defying these stereotypes, Adam was resisting the power system that created them. Addressing and defying stereotypes was one form of resistance that the students often utilized to work towards agency and become Foucauldian subjects. These stereotypes were created based on expectations that the majority (in Adam’s case, he referred to the White, heterosexual, and even White gay majorities.) had of the individuals. By defying these stereotypes, Adam was enacting agency forced upon him by the majority; for him to become a Foucauldian subject, he had to consciously confront these stereotypes and defy the majority’s expectations.
Because Adam was open about his sexual orientation within most discourses, he was comfortable outwardly defying any stereotypes associated with his ethnicity and sexual orientation. On the other hand, other students often embraced stereotypes, often disregarding comments that their friends made because they knew “that they were not serious.” Beth described it best when she said, “I don’t really know like now my friends will joke about like ask me being gay and Asian and like I said, I’m cool with it. Because I know they’re not serious about it.” However, unlike Adam, Beth was not open about her sexual orientation within as many discourses as Adam. By acquiescing to the stereotypes, Beth eliminated any pressure to openly act upon or fully express her sexual orientation.

Stereotypes about GLB identity also influenced their decision-making about revealing their orientation. Gabby thought that society accepted bisexuality rather than gay or lesbian identity. Gabby saw bisexuality as less of a threat than being gay or lesbian. As a result, other than within her home life, she was open about her sexual orientation. She also believed that if she were to reveal her orientation to her parents, they would be accepting because bisexuality left open the possibility that she would have a long-term heterosexual relationship.

Finally, Howard had to manage stereotypes associated with being a Asian/American gay male. These stereotypes affected the types of romantic relationships Howard was able to form. He described having to manage the stereotypes.

You’ve seen like they call them GAM, gay Asian men. Sometimes you’ve seen like on online posts, you see no femmies, (feminine people), and no fats, no GAM. Like they put that category together. They categorize gay Asian men as a group and put it together with fat people. It’s just very insulting to me, and I think
people should stop using those words.

I mean occasionally I meet really nice older guys. But I have this psychological thing with them because if I do, I feel like oh my God, if I want to have a boyfriend, this is the type of boyfriend I’ll have except that he’s too old for me. Why should I even care if he’s too old? Because if I date him, I feel like I would become one of those Asians who sort of settled with an old guy, even though I really do like the person. So I can’t see myself dating them.

The stereotypes about gay, Asian/American men as hypomasculine put him in a hierarchy where he was not in control of the romantic relationships that he could form.

Subsequently, he felt insulted that other gay men degraded him in such a way. These comments and stereotypes also affected his overall confidence with his self-identity. The negative effect on his self-confidence shows how individuals can project these stereotypes onto themselves, thus affecting their perceptions of their self-identity.

Thus, managing stereotypes associated with identifying as GLB and/or Asian/American impacted these students’ understanding of their self-identity and their willingness to reveal their sexual orientation to others. Stereotypes became particularly salient for me when conducting this study, as I was asked about my own sexual orientation. I think that these students assumed that because I wanted to study GLB students that I also identified as either GLB. When asked, I was unsure on how best to respond. While a part of me wanted to publicly proclaim my heterosexuality and stance as an ally, I feared that the participants would not be truthful with me during the initial interview if they knew about my heterosexuality. I needed their trust in order to conduct a meaningful study, and I feared that by being in a position of privilege as heterosexual I
would not gain that trust. At the same time, I also did not want claim a sexual identity that I did not personally identify with and live. My situation reflected a personal “crisis of representation.” The crisis of representation is based on the idea that researchers and their training are inherently embedded into the research that they conduct (Flaherty, Denzin, Manning, & Snow, 2002; Segall, 2001). In my case, my own sexual orientation as heterosexual and ethnicity as Japanese American embedded me in this project, as the participants wanted to know about my sexual orientation. Their participation in my study allowed me to be a part of their lives and a part of the discourse that helped to create them as Foucauldian subjects. In order for them to participate, they had to be willing and decide to reveal their sexual orientation to me; in turn, I wanted to know their decision-making process when choosing to reveal their orientation.

In the end, I was faced with the challenge of staying true to my own self-identity while entering into these students’ lives and their discourses without significantly disrupting or changing their world. Throughout this study, I was also challenged to authentically represent these students’ voices and communicate their experiences in a meaningful way. As Segall (2001) explains, the challenge is to balance the Self and Other, the Self being me as the researchers and all of my personal qualities, including my education and identity, and the Other as the participants, their voices and experiences. Both the Self and Other are needed within any research study, and authentically representing both, to the best of my ability, was my concern. When asked by participants about my sexual orientation, I never denied my heterosexuality, but I also made sure to explain my belief that sexuality was a fluid concept, and that while I might be “heterosexual at the moment,” one’s sexuality is always changing. I also made sure to
explain my belief and passion to have the voices of Asian/American GLB students heard, and that this study was a way for that to occur. This explanation seemed to please the participants and allowed me to address this crisis of representation in the most meaningful way possible.

Conclusion

To address the crisis of representation, I had to utilize the students and their stories in ways that allowed me to answer my research questions without losing their voices and experiences. Simply stated, I had to speak “about” these students instead of “for” these students. This issue was particularly salient to my second research question and the impact of revealing or concealing their sexual orientation on their overall self-identity. Overall, the students were striving for a certain degree of agency within discursive regimes; these regimes either promoted or inhibited that agency. Their decisions regarding who knew about their sexual orientation impacted that agency and therefore impacted their understanding of themselves as Asian/American GLB individuals. One factor in their decision-making was the degree to which they had to manage stereotypes about gay, lesbian, or bisexuality and/or Asian/American identity. Students like Beth allowed her friends to use those stereotypes because she was still learning about herself as an Asian/American lesbian and learning her role that her identity had within her friendship circles. Others, like Adam, wanted to openly challenge those stereotypes because he had enough of an understanding about himself as an Asian/American gay male to realize that his identity consisted of more than just stereotypes.
The relationship between these decisions about their sexual orientation and their overall self-identity was intertwined. As the students revealed their orientation to more individuals, they were enacting their agency within different environments and among different people. They were able to achieve a higher degree of agency within hegemonic, discursive regimes, and thus were able to better understand themselves as Asian/American GLB individuals. Their growing confidence in their self-identity in turn made them more comfortable revealing their sexual orientation to more people. For these students, the college experience was an opportunity to further explore their self-identity and the role that they had as individuals within each of these discursive environments. In the next section, I explore the impact their decisions about their sexual orientation had on their overall educational experience.
Chapter 8: Impact of Disclosure/Concealment on Educational Experience

Introduction

As previously mentioned, higher education was one of the multiple discourses that the students navigated and managed. Within higher education, the students enacted their agency to varying degrees and with this agency, were better able to understand themselves as Asian/American GLB individuals. Subsequently, a discussion about the impact of their decisions on revealing their sexual orientation would be incomplete without discussing the impact of these decisions on their educational experiences.

At the time of the interviews, the students in the study were all at different parts of their college careers. Among the undergraduate students, two were in their first year, one was a second-year, another was a junior near graduation. Among the graduate students, three were in their first year and came from different undergraduate institutions, one was in his fourth year, and another was in his first year at another local school; however, during the previous term, he had finished his undergraduate studies at the institution used in this study. Considering the variety of points within their educational experiences, the students decisions regarding their sexual orientation impacted their educational choices in different ways.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), in their work on the impact of college, discuss how changes in students can occur along five different dimensions, which can be further broken down into three key areas, 1) knowledge, i.e., subject matter competence, 2)
skills, including cognitive and intellectual growth, and 3) values, including moral
development and psychosocial changes. These areas of impact can also be used to frame
the understanding of the educational experience for students, as they help to explain
educational goals and what students take away from the experience. In the following
sections, I discuss how decisions regarding their sexual orientation impacted these
aspects of their college experience and also discuss in greater detail the impact of higher
education discourse on students’ willingness to disclose.

Knowledge, Skills, Values, and Identity

In choosing a career and major, college students are making a conscious decision
about they kind of knowledge and cognitive skills they would like to gain through the
experience. While many of the students in the study had majors not directly connected to
their ethnic or sexual identity, for two students, Adam and Carrie, their choice of major
and career was impacted by their self-identity as Asian/American GLB. Adam started
college as a linguistics major, thinking that he wanted a career as a translator. After an
internship translating for a news company, he contemplated changing his major.

And at that time, interestingly I had an internship translating global news, so I
found reading them really interesting. And that made me really, I don’t know.
Like North Korea and South Korea stuff and the international problems of Iran,
Switzerland, and United States being in political powers or something like that.
That made me think. That made me want to tell my opinion to all. Because of that
I changed my major from linguistics to international studies.

He wanted to use this new major to work for the United Nations, and particularly to work
for GLBT rights. As he described,
I want to go to the United Nations, and I want to work on human rights in Africa, Asia, like in developing countries. It’s not definite, but I want to work on conflict settlement. Like I said, I’m very interested in North Korea and South Korea and like all like related countries, but more interested in human rights, GLBT especially. On the opposite side of the world. I mean I was not supposed to say that I’m interested in it. I wanted to help them.

Adam’s personal experiences and the fact that he identified as both Asian/American and GLB impacted his desire to advocate for GLBT human rights, particularly in both North and South Korea.

Similarly, Carrie wanted to change her major from art to social entrepreneurship. The university did not formally offer such a major so she wanted to create one through the university’s Personalized Studies Program (PSP). She described why she wanted to change her major.

I decided I don’t want to do art, cartoons specifically, but I decided well why don’t I use it to help people more than help myself. No matter what I do, it will never really last. It’ll never make an impact. Like a work of art, I spend 5 hours drawing it and no one will care. So, I figured instead of doing something like-driven only for me that will be thrown away in like next week, I figured well why don’t I do something that WILL make an impact that will change someone’s life. So, I thought about social work, like helping people. And I think that’s what the answer is. So, my dream is to really make a world change for the better, but be very smart about it, because you know they have that saying like ‘the path to hell is paved with good intentions.’ So, just trying to figure out the best way to go
about it designing the best way to address all the problems, all the issues without any consequences that comes afterwards.

For both Adam and Carrie, their choice and change of major were political acts of resistance against the dominant discourse. Both Adam and Carrie recognized that the GLBT individuals were within the margins of society and therefore not full citizens when compared to their heterosexual counterparts. As previous researchers have noted (Concannon, 2008; Phelan, 2001), this marginalization has led to GLBT individuals being treated as second-class citizens, with social policy and protocol not granting them full and equal rights. In choosing these majors, Adam and Carrie expressed a desire to become a part in changing this system of marginalization. In doing so, they also inscribed this political activism as part of their self-identity. In choosing these majors and thus performing these acts of resistance, they were able to further develop their self-identity by incorporating political activism, enact their given agency, and help make their individual identities more of a reality within the discursive regime.

On a micro level, Ian also performed acts of resistance within his individual classes. When asked if the issue of sexual orientation ever came up in his classes, he said, “I made it happen.” When asked to elaborate, he explained,

Let’s see, for one of my papers it was “Perceptions of Homosexuality in China” and then I did “Perceptions of Homosexuality in Japan” which was interesting because both professors were grad teachers or rather GAs. When I mentioned that to the first GA, she was like, “Oh, that’s something we never really talked about in China.” She was like “go for it.” And the same thing happened with my Japanese GA. She was very Japanese and was like, “Oh, we’ve
never talked about that before.” She said, “Well let’s find to see if we can find
information on that.”

And it was very interesting that I was able to pull up, that I made a topic
discussion. We had to present this in front of class so I talked about it and that
was my second Bachelor’s degree.

Since the topic of sexual orientation or issues related to Asian/American gay identity
were not being mentioned in his classes, he went against the dominant discourse and
brought the topic up himself, and in turn educated himself, the instructors, and students.

In discussing these topics in his courses, Ian was able to establish himself and define
himself as an Asian/American gay male within the academic environment. As he stated,

I don’t hide it anymore so I’m pretty open in talking about it. I did a
presentation maybe two weeks ago on information seeking habits of
undergraduate students and they were like, “Why are you interested in this
topic?” and I was like, “Well, because I’m a big gay. I’m a big poof.” And they
were like, “Big poof?” And I was like, “I’m a homosexual guy. This big gay guy,
okay? If you haven’t noticed, I dress a lot nicer than some of you guys.” And they
were like, “Oh.”

So yeah, I am open about it. They might think I’m really nice and quiet or
whatever. but it’s not something I hide, it’s not something I talk about though but
if they ask me sure I’ll say it. And I will talk about these topics either way. And
I’ve been given positive feedback from the people.
By choosing classroom assignments related to his ethnic and sexual identity, he also chose to reveal his sexual orientation to his classmates. This act helped to make his identity as an Asian/American gay individual a reality.

Finally, the students’ experiences, including deciding to reveal their sexual orientation, in college helped them to see how their core selves, their values, and beliefs fit within the greater society. For Dan, the process of being in college and specifically a counseling major helped him gain self-esteem and confidence in himself as an Asian/American gay man. As he described,

And this is something that I’m going to counseling for and trying to change my thought process because I’m just like, “No, I know I’m a great person. I know I have a lot of amiable characteristics. I’m very secure. I’m funny.” I expect people to like me and I hope that that’s not the only reason they like me, but you can’t be sure.

Through gaining this self-confidence in himself as an Asian/American gay male, he was able to formulate a value system where he could learn where his values and beliefs fit in relationship to others. As he stated, “I think because I went to counseling and undergraduate for four years, really getting out of that dichotomous thinking, helped me to realize how I see others and interact with them.” Dan’s goal with his counseling degree was to work with elderly GLBT individuals, as he saw this group as being largely neglected within society. His choice of counseling as a major and career helped him to see how he related to others and helped him to clarify his own values. His choice also led him to a career as an advocate for GLBT individuals. Therefore, besides clarifying his value system, his choice of major and career helped him to see how his own identity fit
within the greater political discourse. From these educational choices, being an advocate for GLBT individuals became a part of his self-identity and furthered his agency within the greater discourse.

As previously discussed, deciding to reveal one’s sexual orientation can be seen as an act of resistance used to established agency and establish one’s identity within the dominant discourse. Many of the choices that the students made about their educational experience (including coursework and choice of major/career) can also be seen as acts of resistance used to establish agency. In many cases, both acts of resistance informed each other; in revealing their sexual orientation and establishing themselves within the discourse, they were also more likely to make certain decisions about their educational experience.

Bio-power, Resistance, and Higher Education

By revealing their orientation and making these decisions about their education, the students were also resisting against bio-power in higher education. As discussed in Chapter 6, the students all made informal acknowledgement of this bio-power. This bio-power made it difficult to establish meaningful relationships with professors and classmates; the students sited the large lecture halls and the disjointed design of classes (i.e., four to five classes each term with different classmates and professors in each) as the reason they had this difficulty.

For some, this bio-power made them cautious about revealing their sexual orientation within the classroom. Edward was willing to reveal his bisexuality to his friends but was more hesitant in the classroom setting.

With friends I’d be fine with it. And in the classroom setting, I don’t know. I just
think that maybe there’s a limit to how ready I am on some things and part of it
is… I do feel it’s an issue of personal bravery.

For those willing to resist higher education’s bio-power, the students selectively decided
on the situations where it was appropriate to resist. Dan described an incident with a
professor at his undergraduate institution.

There was a teacher who was very conservative. It was a business course, and I
mean he said some very biased comments against Black students, and it was
something I would have not – I just wouldn’t never have brought up, my sexual
orientation in that class. I believe you pick the emotional hills you want to die on.
That wasn’t my Bunker Hill, so I just avoided the issue, and it wasn’t like he was
my close advisor or someone, but—I mean that’s always a consideration,
especially when someone holds the keys to power.

In this case, the professor used bio-power, in this case in the form of violent, racist
comments to ensure that his class consisted of docile bodies. The racist comments served
to normalize the class and also created a climate of heteronormativity, significant because
Dan decided not to reveal his sexual orientation in the class. For Dan, the effort it would
have taken to overcome the power regime within that class and establish his individual
identity was not worth any potential negative consequences. This example illustrates how
bio-power and violence can strongly subjugate individuals, make it difficult for them to
enact agency, and become fully realized as individual beings.

Howard was in the process of trying to understand the system of bio-power in
place and starting to understand his role within it. He described his classes and advisor in
the following,
It’s great. I mean I like how the classes were structured. You have the core and then you have a bunch of other classes you can choose [from]. And professors are very helpful. I mean if you want to discuss problems with them, they’re always there to discuss [them] with you. And I met some really good professors. I was really impressed by their knowledge in the Material Sciences. And my advisor is a great guy especially. He’s very friendly, invites us to his home a lot for various activities. And he’s probably going to take us out to a skiing trip.

Howard enjoyed the structure of the classes but found his professors and particularly his advisor to be easily accessible outside of class. He had not told his advisor about his sexual orientation but was starting to suspect that his advisor knows he was gay.

He once made a joke that made people think that he knew that the other gay guy was gay. He sort of figured it out himself because he made a joke about him giving someone a manly hug or something. I was like, “ooh, does he know?” And it was never discussed so I don’t know. Maybe he figured that out too, maybe he hasn’t, I don’t know.

For Howard, the bio-power that allowed his advisor to be in the position of power contributed to him not telling his advisor. As Howard stated, “I just don’t see the point to go out of the way to come out to him.” At the same time, however, Howard was comfortable enough to socialize with his advisor outside of class. Being comfortable interacting with his advisor outside of class led him to suspect that his advisor already knew about his gay identity.

The system of bio-power within higher education impacted the students in this study in a variety of ways. Bio-power made it difficult for some students to establish
meaningful relationships with both professors and with other students, which in turn made them hesitant to disclose their sexual orientation within the classroom setting. Bio-power also affected some of the students in that it forced them to be selective on when to reveal their sexual orientation. Overall, the bio-power present within the higher education discourse influenced how and when students disclosed their sexual orientation, and particularly within the classroom setting.

Conclusion

For these students, the educational experience, and particularly the classroom experience, affected how comfortable they were revealing their sexual orientation to others. The system of bio-power made revealing their sexual orientation difficult for some. On the other hand, in understanding their self-identity and achieving a certain degree of agency, they were also more likely to make specific choices about their educational experience.

Overall, much in the way that resistance is inevitable by subjects, the students’ decisions about their educational experience were inevitable considering their decisions about revealing their sexual orientation. Since power cannot exist without resistance and resistance by subjects is inevitable, agency is to be expected. For some of the students in this study, their decisions regarding their educational experience was a way to further enact the agency imparted on them from the initial act of resistance (i.e., revealing their sexual orientation). Some, like Adam and Carrie, chose majors and careers that will allow them to work/resist against the dominant discourse as a career. These career decisions allowed them to develop a sense of political activism, one that would work toward making GLBT individuals first-class citizens. Ian chose assignments on
Asian/American GLB issues, even when the topic was not formally offered as an option in his courses, to further his knowledge on Asian/American GLB issues and to establish himself as an Asian/American gay male within the academic environment. Dan chose counseling to help him explore his own self-identity and come to a greater understanding about how his values and beliefs fit within society. The students keeping their orientation concealed within higher education were still understanding and learning to navigate the bio-power present within higher education. The fact that they were keeping their orientation concealed did not imply a lack of resistance, but instead showed that these students were still learning to establish themselves as agents within the higher education discourse. Overall, their educational experiences helped certain students achieve a higher degree of agency and work toward conceiving their identity as Asian/American GLB individuals.
Chapter 9: Implications and Conclusions

Summary: Multiple Discourse Management

The data obtained from the Asian/American GLB students in this study show that they were managing multiple discourses (i.e., home life, country of origin, religion, higher education, and social networking sites) within their lives, each of which created a unique set of stressors for them. These discourses were competing with students in different ways because of differing expectations about sexual orientation and the acceptance of it within each discourse. In addition, the students’ Asian/American ethnicity impacted the expectations other had of them within the discourses. Within home life, some of the students had parents who wanted them to have children, with the unspoken expectation that they be in heterosexual relationships in order to create that family. The devout, religious parents refused to acknowledge the possibility that their child might be GLB. Religion also made the students hesitant to reveal their sexual orientation to others; they believed that devoutly religious individuals would not be accepting of the GLB lifestyle, regardless of ethnicity.

The students generally found more acceptance about their sexual orientation within higher education. However, a dearth of visible Asian/American GLB role models made it difficult for some to further a sense of agency and truly show themselves as Asian/American GLB individuals. Some students also found more freedom to reveal their orientation on social networking sites. Others were hesitant to put information about their
sexual orientation on SNS because of the easy access other people had to view their online profiles. Finally, for the international students, their country of origin impacted their willingness to reveal their sexual orientation. Culturally, they knew that within their country of origin, GLB identity was not accepted. They felt that the United States would be more open to GLB identity, but were still faced with pockets of racist and homophobic behavior. These international students thus needed to learn to manage these different expectations between the different countries.

The foundation for the relationships the students had within these discourses was a Foucauldian power dynamic. Their decisions to reveal their sexual orientation were based on the nature of that power relationship. This power dynamic also allowed the students to reveal to others specific knowledge about their sexual orientation and self-identity, which in turn helped to solidify the students as agents within each of these environments.

These relationships also impacted the formation of their ethnic and sexual identities. Their relationships with certain individuals often resulted in them exploring their sexual identity over their ethnic one. For students such as Dan, the change from home life to higher education was the impetus needed for him to prioritize the exploration of his ethnic identity. In addition, many of the students felt more comfortable presenting their sexual identity within certain environments, e.g., GLBT student organization meetings, illustrating the importance of space in forming self-identity.

Finally, the decisions about revealing their sexual orientation also impacted their educational experience, as some students decided on majors and careers that would allow them to develop their political advocacy and their political identity. In order to safely
reveal their sexual orientation, they also had to overcome the system of bio-power in place, which many students expressed was very difficult for them to do.

Overall, managing these discourses and relationships created many different stressors for these students. From the administrative perspective, it is important to remember that the students experience these stressors. Deciding to reveal one’s sexual orientation can impact the students’ self-confidence about themselves, impact their academic performance and can affect their overall academic experience. A “cookie cutter” approach to helping them address these stressors would be an inadequate way to address their problems and an inadequate way to support them through the educational process. Such a straightforward approach would only further reinforce the dominant discourse in place and would create additional challenges for these students to overcome.

The Complexity of the Lived Experience

For these students, their experiences as Asian/American and GLB was a challenging and complex one. Because they were Asian/American, those within the majority considered them to be a model minority. With that stereotypes also came the assumption that they did not have any trouble adjusting to the college experience. The reality of their lived experience is that as Asian/American GLB individuals, they were far from being a model group without any problems. The students in this study came from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds. While some were international students who grew up in Asian countries, others were biracial or adopted into a White family. Simply based on racial/ethnic background alone, the students were more heterogeneous than their status as Asian/American would suggest. What further complicated their experience was their sexual orientation. Because they did not self-identify as heterosexual, they also had to
manage an emerging sexual identity that they also had to balance with their racial/ethnic one. This intersectionality between racial/ethnic identity and sexual orientation was what compelled me to conduct this study and was what made this an interesting group to research.

While the students’ identities may be intertwined, complex, and intersectional, these students lived in different fragmented communities, both inside and outside of the university setting. The students had to manage their sexual orientation and control who knew about their sexual orientation within different discourses. These discourses all had a series of complicated norms and expectations associated with their sexual orientation that the students learned so that they could make decisions on who knew about their sexual orientation. What is clear from this study was that managing all of these discourses and controlling this knowledge resulted in them having to segment their lives, meaning students could be open about their sexual orientation in the residence hall, but not in the classroom or to a professor, and be open to one parent but not the other. This created stress for these students and made them cautious about entering any new environment or forming new relationships. At the end of this study, there exists a greater question on how to bring together these different communities and make the lived experience more seamless for these students. While such a large question cannot simply be answered within the context of this study, I will begin by suggesting small ways in which the leaders within higher education can begin to make this seamlessness occur. What is evident through this study is that this complexity of these students’ lives cannot and should not be ignored. My focus in this final chapter will be on ways in which higher
education can promote a climate where furthering their given agency is encouraged, which in turns can help them be successful in college and beyond.

Implications for Higher Education as an Institution/Discourse

Specifically, when considering higher education as a dominant discourse, the focus should be on initiatives that can work towards changing the dominant ideology and enhance people’s understanding about the experiences of the Asian/American GLB population. Doing so would allow these students to establish relationships where they would feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation to that person. As has been discussed in this dissertation, the decision and act of revealing their sexual orientation can positively effect the students’ emerging sense of agency and positively impact their educational outcomes.

Higher education as an institution is in a position of power as it has the ability to significantly impact all students’ lives, both inside and outside of the college setting. One way in which the impact of higher education on students has been studied is through campus climate research. While some significant, large-scale studies have been done on the campus climate for GLBT students (e.g., see Rankin, 2003), much more has been done on campus racial climate (Hurtado, Griffin, Arellano, & Cuellar, 2008). Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1998; 1999) define campus racial climate as a multidimensional construct, which takes into consideration factors such as the institutional historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion, community members’ attitudes and perceptions of others, structural diversity, and intergroup relations between campus community members. Because of the multidimensional nature of campus climate, external factors such as policy, behaviors, and social practices can also impact the
campus climate (Hurtado et al., 1998). Overall, these multiple dimensions can help others to assess how the campus’ overall level of inclusiveness towards minority racial students can impact their educational outcomes.

While this Hurtado et al.’s (1998; 1999) framework has been primarily used in studying the campus racial climate, it can and has been used as a way to frame studies on campus climate for other groups of individuals (Hurtado et al., 2008). Many of these other studies on campus climate often propose addressing or improving the climate by focusing on specific dimensions within Hurtado et al.’s framework, such as students’ perceptions of diversity and inclusiveness (e.g., see Ancis et al., 2000; Evans & Herriott, 2004; Park, 2009). While a single sided approach to addressing campus climate can be useful, when considering higher education as a discourse, a multifaceted approaching to addressing the issues is actually warranted.

Specifically, when considering the experiences of Asian/American GLB students, this dissertation has shown that their relationships with others within the discourses are key for them to be able to feel safe revealing their sexual orientation, safely enact their given agency, and help them to achieve educational outcomes. Therefore, instead of a single-minded approach to addressing the climate for these students, administrators need to ask in what ways they can affect the norms and expectations associated GLB identity, especially when also considering race/ethnicity. In doing so, they can help to change people’s perceptions about the population and eventually work towards changing their understanding and beliefs about this groups of students. For example, the students in this study felt that homosexuality was a topic not often discussed in their classes. In addition, because of the large classes they often took, they felt that they could not approach their
professors, and thus could not establish relationships where they might feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation. Administrators could address these issues in a variety of ways. While many would consider it unreasonable to require that homosexuality be a required topic within a mechanical engineering class, educating instructors on the issues facing Asian/American GLB students and giving the instructors concrete ways to create a welcoming and open classroom can help to work towards creating a classroom environment where students might feel comfortable establishing positive relationships, which in turn makes them feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation to others. (I will further discuss the implications of this type of training and education later in this chapter.) Besides educating the classroom instructors, administrators can also look at their academic structure, e.g., offering classes on sexuality and/or intersectionality of identity, as a way to promote and educate the greater community. Creating these types of academic initiatives can also communicate to Asian/American GLB students that the university administration supports them, and is actively seeking to educate others about them as a group.

Evidence of this has been seen at the university within this study. Since 2008, a group of faculty formed a Diversity and Identity Studies Collective. On their website, they state their goals to be “1) promote innovative and intersectional research on issues of diversity, identity, and social difference and power, 2) coordinate and advertise courses and curricula on these issues, and 3) sponsor diversity-focused intellectual and creative programs” (quoted from the university website). Since 2009, this collective has received formal funding through the university and has sponsored several campus events, the last with over one hundred attendees. I was personally able to attend several of these events,
and saw many students in the audience, including two of the study participants. Unfortunately, I attended these events after interviewing these participants, and due to time constraints, was unable to follow up to obtain their thoughts about the event. However, establishing these types of initiatives on different levels can let these students see that the university and its administration acknowledges the complexity of their lived experiences and is working toward having others recognize the same.

University administrators should also work toward creating an environment where these students feel safe revealing their sexual orientation and in turn help these students further enact their given agency. Again, a multifaceted approach across all aspects of university life is warranted. Evidence of creating this type of environment is already evident within certain aspects of the university environment. For example, Adam’s RA was a person he felt that he could turn to when other residents make discriminatory remarks against him. He felt safe going to his RA to address the problem and felt that the RA addressed the issue promptly. On the other hand, when Dan had the professor make racist remarks in class, he did not report the professor to other personnel, primarily because he was unsure where to go. Creating avenues for students to report incidents safely and communicating these avenues to them would help these students feel safe revealing their sexual orientation to others and in turn help them to positively enacting their given agency.

Finally, a discussion about higher education as an institution and how to go about changing its discursive norms would be incomplete without a discussion of bio-power. The students in this study mentioned the large lecture halls and classroom buildings and the inaccessible professors in these courses as aspects of bio-power that affected their
ability to form relationships with their classmates and professors. While this type of bio-
power can help to establish order within the classroom, as the students described, it does
not create an environment where they are comfortable forming meaningful relationships
with others. While many would consider it to be unrealistic to suggest that the university
reduce the size of their classes, professors can make a concentrated effort to reach out to
their students outside of traditional office hours. For example, by being an active advisor
for a student organization or regularly attending campus events (particularly
organizations related to students’ identity), students can see their professors have an
interest in their lives outside of the classroom. This type of involvement can informally
communicate to these students that their professors are open and would make the students
feel comfortable revealing their sexual orientation to them. Making an effort to reach out
to these students and understand their experiences can help the students feel as though
they can reach out to the professors if needed, and in turn help to further make their
educational experience a positive one.

Training and Education

The results from this study have numerous implications for the training and
education of the campus community. One issue that was repeatedly mentioned by the
students was a lack of role models for them. The students had few points of reference on
exactly how to act/perform the Asian/American GLB identity. Most had to look to
general GLBT media for that inspiration. Howard explained the impact the movie
Brokeback Mountain had on him. “I see how that movie made me think a lot. Of course I
don’t want to end up as the main character, just regretting on what could have happened.”
Dan believed any potential role models within society to negatively impact his self-identity.

Well, the glib response is, for gay males, I shouldn’t be eating because you will never see a food advertisement other than alcohol in a gay publications, GQ, Interview. Food is demonized. You must be perfectly manicured and together. You must be super masculine. You must have the perfect body almost as though masculine and body kind of make up for the fact that you like men that are somehow more feminine and therefore less male than straight males. They can’t be disabled. You can’t be a person of color. God forbid you actually live to 35 because they don’t exist either. You know these invisible populations within the gay population. You know you don’t see Asians represented much in media. The one person that like everyone can say – oh, Sandra Oh in Grey’s Anatomy or that guy in Harold & Kumar.

Dan’s response illustrated how he grew up surrounded by specific images of Asian/Americans and GLB individuals. Furthermore, Dan attributed the lack of Asian/American gay role models to issues that he has had with body image.

So the idea that there are gay Asians, I mean, wow. Who would have thought? I mean media has a very powerful thing. I think that’s one of the reasons You know I struggled with so many body image issues.

Frances also looked to the media to learn about romantic, lesbian relationships. In the following, she discussed the impact of The L Word, a show focusing on the lives of several lesbian women.
I watch *The L Word*. I guess for a long time I always thought that homosexual relationships, they’re more committed to each other, that’s what my first opinion was. And then, after watching *The L Word* and then finding more about it, reading on websites, I realized that they’re just like any normal couple. You know when someone is cheating on someone and then just break off and would get back together. It’s just pretty normal.

While *The L Word* is a positive example of how to form romantic lesbian relationships, it should be noted that none of the major characters on the show are Asian/American. When I pointed this out to Frances, she was aware of the lack of Asian/American characters but disregarded my comment and seemed to not fully understand the significance this lack of Asian/American representation had.

In conducting field research and viewing these students at various campus events and students organization meetings, I was able to see firsthand the lack of role models within higher education. At the student organization meetings, only one faculty advisor attended. (This was at an Asian/American student organization; the advisor was White.) In each of the student organization’s meetings, I had a list of questions that I used to facilitate a discussion. These questions focused on the challenges facing Asian/American GLB students or GLB students of color. It was clear from their responses that most had never had meaningful interactions with GLBT persons of color and particularly those of Asian/American decent.

While it would be the administrators’ responsibility to recruit Asian/American GLB faculty and staff, all campus members can and should be educated on the importance of role modeling on student development. Even without actual
Asian/American GLB individuals, other faculty and staff can be role models to this student population by outwardly showing support. I had personal experience with this while conducting the study. After the interviews, I was contacted by several of the participants. In one case, I had forwarded Adam information on an internship program that I thought matched his career goals to work on human rights. After sending him the information, he asked that I write a letter of recommendation. Having interacted with him some as a graduate assistant, I agreed. Adam later asked me to participate in a class project for him. In another case, after presenting to a student group for GLBT students of color, the student leaders contacted me, asking for advice on how to improve their membership and obtain more allies as members of their group. Finally, after my interview with Gabby, she asked me several questions about how gay marriage worked in the United States, and asked advice on how best to gain U.S. citizenship. By showing an interest in their lives and an interest in their experiences as Asian/American GLB students on campus, I gained the students’ trust; they looked to me for advice and support. Their reactions show that this group of students was looking for other faculty and staff that can support them through college. Training and education initiatives should be focused on all faculty and staff, regardless of their ethnicity and sexual orientation, and should teach them how to provide that kind of support. By educating them in this way, all campus community members would be better able to mentor and guide Asian/American GLB students while in college.

In addition, by educating the campus community on the issues facing Asian/American GLB students, students could form positive relationships with those community members. These relationships would sway them towards revealing their
sexual orientation. In doing so, they may have a better overall college experience, develop a more positive self-identity, and develop a better understanding of themselves as Asian/American GLB individuals. Making the effort and devoting the resources towards this training and education would help to create a positive environment for this group of students and help to ensure their success in college and beyond.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study was conducted at a large, public research institution in the Midwest. This area of the country is known to be politically conservative (Coleman, 2010). While the university studied had been continuously sited for being a GLBT friendly campus (Campus Pride, 2010; Windmeyer, 2006), the politically conservative nature within the geographical area likely affected the students’ perceptions about their sexual orientation and their willingness to disclose to others outside of the university. Conducting this study on another GLBT friendly campus in a more politically liberal geographical area could yield different results and would also allow for comparison across institutions.

For this study, I had nine participants from varying backgrounds, including international, Asian American, and biracial students. This variety was not my original intention; I originally wanted to focus my study on Asian American undergraduate students. However, I ran into difficulty recruiting a sufficient number of these students. As a result, I expanded my study to include Asian international and graduate students. Future studies should focus on more specific groups of students, i.e., specific Asian ethnic groups and/or specific sexual orientations.

Finally, another approach to studying this group is to conduct a longitudinal, qualitative assessment of their experiences. For the younger students in this study, their
understanding of their sexual orientation and their overall self-identity was evolving and changing to a greater degree than some of the older graduate students in the study. For the younger students, their lack of life experiences simply meant that they were still learning about themselves and their place within society. An extension of this study would be to interview these students at various points in their college career to see how their understanding about their self-identity or how their decision-making about revealing their sexual orientation changed over time. A longitudinal assessment would also allow for future study on additional effects of revealing or concealing their sexual orientation, such as its effects on stress levels, overall psychological health, and their perceptions of new and previously established relationships.

Final Thoughts

The important thing here, I believe, is that truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power… truth isn’t the reward of free spirits… Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanism and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. – Michel Foucault (Gordon, 1980, p. 131)

As Foucault explains in this interview, truth, power, and discourse are all related. The three cannot exist without each other. Society and its members’ expectations help to create and establish these “regimes of truth.” These regimes contribute to power
dynamics and relationships. These dynamics in turn help to reinforce these regimes of truth. In addition, Foucault adds that knowledge and discourse cannot exist without each other. As he states,

Knowledge is defined by the possibilities of use and appropriation offered by discourse… there is no knowledge without a particular discursive practice; and any discursive practice may be defined by the knowledge that it forms. (Foucault, 1972)

In other words, discourses help to establish a knowledge base, which in turn also contributes to creating a power dynamic.

Previous studies on college student development and the impact of the college experience on student’s self-identity assume that identity development occurs in the ways that Erik Erikson (1968) intended, i.e., a stepwise, linear fashion. The manner in which Foucault explains the interrelationship between power, truth, knowledge and discourse is a useful and meaningful framework that contradicts these essentialist assumptions. My results show that the Asian/American GLB students in this study came to learn about themselves and their self-identity in far more complicated ways. They navigated multiple discourses and managed different discursive expectations in order to discover how to “be” an Asian/American GLB individual within society. Through acts of “performing” their identity, these students came to identify as Asian/American GLB in their own way.

For this study, I focused specifically on one way to perform their sexual identity, i.e., revealing one’s sexual orientation. Through repeatedly making decisions about revealing their sexual orientation within various discourses, the students would eventually make their Asian/American GLB identity a “reality.” In doing so, they also worked toward
achieving agency and defined themselves both within and beyond the dominant discourse.

Re-conceptualizing the Asian/American GLB student experience in this way has numerous implications for campus administrators and community members. Administrators should think about more than just governing and regulating the masses and focus on multifaceted approaches to creating mutual understanding about the involved nature of the Asian/American GLB experience. As even the most remote college campuses become increasingly diverse, this perspective and approach to policy and practices will become increasingly important, as one approach will not meet the needs of all of its students. Also, this re-conceptualization through a Foucauldian framework also reveals that the students were looking for role models and looking to form positive relationships with others. Proper education and training on the issues facing Asian/American GLB students and on the complexities of deciding on revealing their sexual orientation is crucial to establishing those positive relationships. Addressing these issues and implementing such changes would enhance the college experience for these students and make them more likely to be more successful.

In conducting this study, I wanted to reproduce a “reality” that expresses these students’ voices in a meaningful way (Segall, 2001). As Foucault says, truth and power cannot exist without each other. These students were living a truth dictated at least in part by power and discursive formations. These students were able to navigate multiples discourses and discursive formation in such a way that they could further enact their agency and allow them to emerge as Asian/American GLB individuals.
This struggle to emerge as Asian/American GLB individuals within a dominant, heterosexist discourse is particularly relevant considering recent news that GLB youth around the country have committed suicide because they were bullied by other youth. While I cannot begin to comprehend the magnitude and weight of the emotions that these youth were feeling, it is clear that they carried a burden associated with being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Faced with such blatant discrimination from others, they carried with them a great deal of pain associated with their sexual identity. Unfortunately, they ended their life so as to end that pain and suffering. With this study, I hope to bring to light the difficulty behind the lived experiences of GLB youth (and particularly Asian/American GLB youth), and have others see the impact that they can have on these individual’s lives. I know that my own work and role as an ally for the GLB population is not complete with this study; I am intent on remaining a strong advocate for all GLB individuals for many years to come, regardless of where my own personal life may take me.
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Asian Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Students Wanted for a Research Study

“A Foucauldian Analysis of Asian American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students’ Process of Disclosing their Sexual Orientation and Its Impact on Identity Construction”

The purpose of the research is to study the impact that disclosing your sexual orientation has had on your self-identity and your educational experience.

Participants should initially agree to a 1.5 to 2 hour initial interview with possible follow-up interviews. Participants will also have an option of taking part in a second part of the study if they desire.

Participants will be compensated with a $25 bookstore gift card for partaking in this study.

For information please contact, Mitsu Narui at narui.1@osu.edu or 614-859-2303.

This research is conducted under the direction of Tatiana Suspitsyna, Assistant Professor, Educational Policy and Leadership, Higher Education and Student Affairs.
Consent to Participate in Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Title:</th>
<th>Foucauldian analysis of Asian American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students’ Process of Disclosing their Sexual Orientation and Its Impact on Identity Construction</th>
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</table>
| Researchers: | Principal Investigator (PI): Tatiana Suspitsyna, Assistant Professor, Educational Policy and Leadership, Higher Education and Student Affairs  
Co-Investigator: Mitsu Narui, PhD Candidate, Higher Education Administration |

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:

The purpose of the research is to study the impact that disclosing your sexual orientation has had on your self-identity and your educational experience.

Procedures/Tasks:

By agreeing to participate in this part of the study, you will take part in a semi-structured interview lasting no longer than 2 hours with one of the study’s investigators. You may be asked to take part in follow-up interviews of approximately 1-2 hours in length if additional information is needed. You will be asked questions about your experiences in college and your experiences in disclosing your sexual orientation to others.

Duration:

You may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you, and you will not lose any benefits to which you are
otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with [REDACTED].

Confidentiality:

Efforts will be made to keep your study-related information confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your participation in this study may be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. In order to maintain confidentiality of your records, Tatiana Suspitsyna and Mitsu Narui will code the data so your name will not be revealed. In addition, all data will be encrypted and stored in a secure location. Only the principal and co-investigators will have access to this confidential information.

Risks:

While all efforts will be made to maintain confidentiality, if confidentiality must be broken, there is a risk involved with others being aware of your sexual orientation. However, as described above, methods will be in place to maintain the highest level of confidentiality. In addition, as in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

Benefits:

The anticipated benefit of participation is the opportunity to discuss feelings, perceptions, and concerns related to the experience of disclosing your sexual orientation and your experiences in college.

Incentives:

After completing the initial interview, participants will receive a $25 Barnes and Noble bookstore gift card.
Participant Rights:

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you are a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Tatiana Supitsyna, Principal Investigator at 614-247-8232 or suspitsyna.1@osu.edu or Mitsu Narui, Co-Investigator at 614-859-2303 or narui.1@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Tatiana Suspitsyna, Principal Investigator at 614-247-8232 or suspitsyna.1@osu.edu.

Signing the consent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

_________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
Printed name of subject    Signature of subject    AM/PM    Date and time

_________________________  ____________________________
Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject    Signature of person authorized to consent for subject
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Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent

AM/PM

Date and time
Study Title: Foucauldian analysis of Asian American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Students’ Process of Disclosing their Sexual Orientation and Its Impact on Identity Construction

Researchers:
Principal Investigator (PI): Tatiana Supsitsyna, Assistant Professor, Educational Policy and Leadership, Higher Education and Student Affairs
Co-Investigator: Mitsu Narui, PhD Candidate, Higher Education Administration

- **This is a consent addendum for research participation.** It contains important additional information about this study and what to expect if you participate (or continue to participate). Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the information with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision about whether or not to participate.

- **Your participation is voluntary.** You may refuse to participate (or to continue to participate) in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any of your usual benefits. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with [Ohio State University]. If you are a student or employee at [Ohio State University], your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

- **This consent addendum provides information in addition to the main consent for the research study in which you are participating.** If you decide to participate (or to continue to participate), you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the signed form. All other information in the original consent form not addressed in this addendum still applies. Please refer to it for any questions you might have.

- **Throughout this consent addendum, “you” refers to the study participant.**

By signing this addendum to the study, you agree to the following. Please check those that apply:

- Provide the investigators to any personal profiles on social networking websites (such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter).
- Allow the investigators to observe you in various community settings. These include but are not limited to the classroom, student organization meetings, campus-wide, and community-wide events.
- The investigators would love to see any papers or journals that you may feel comfortable sharing. If you chose to share this information, it may be provided in any format you feel comfortable, either electronically or with a hard copy.
  - If this information is provided electronically, the documents will be coded and stored on an encrypted drive.
  - If a hard copy is provided, the documents will be scanned and the data subsequently coded and encrypted. The hard copy will then be shredded and destroyed unless you have provided an original copy, in which case the document will be returned directly to you.
Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Tatiana Supitsyna, Principal Investigator at 614-247-8232 or suspitsyna.1@osu.edu or Mitsu Narui, Co-Investigator at 614-859-2303 or narui.1@osu.edu.

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If you are injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Tatiana Suspitsyna, Principal Investigator at 614-247-8232 or suspitsyna.1@osu.edu.

Signing the consent form addendum

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being given new information about the research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction.

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this signed form.

Printed name of subject ____________________________  Signature of subject ____________________________

AM/PM  Date and time

Printed name of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable) ____________________________  Signature of person authorized to consent for subject (when applicable) ____________________________

AM/PM  Date and time

Relationship ____________________________
Investigator/Research Staff
I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the
signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A signed copy of this form has been given
to the participant or his/her representative.

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Witness(es) - *May be left blank if not required by the IRB*

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Appendix C: Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews
(Note: This list is not all inclusive)

1. Tell me a little about yourself. (What year you are at OSU, major, hometown etc.)

2. Why did you choose to attend [ ]?

3. What has your experience been like so far?
   a. Has your experience met your expectations? Why or why not?

4. When did you first realize that different sexual orientations existed? (Or how did you come to learn about different sexual orientations?)

5. When did you first realize that your own sexual orientation might be different (i.e., not heterosexual)?

6. When did you first decide to tell you sexual orientation to another person? What made you decide to tell that person?

7. When or how did you decide to reveal your sexual orientation to another person? What (Decision-making question)

8. Who in your family did you chose to reveal your sexual orientation to? Why that person? Why not other members of your family?

9. Regarding those family members that are aware of your sexual orientation, do they approve? Why do you think they either approve or do not approve?

10. Why haven’t you revealed your sexual orientation to others?

11. What are some factors that influence to whom you tell your sexual orientation to? (How do you decide who to reveal your sexual orientation to?)

12. Have you revealed your sexual orientation to anyone outside of your family?
   a. Why did you decide to reveal your sexual orientation to that person?
   b. How do you decide to whom to reveal your sexual orientation to?

13. How would you describe your sexual orientation? (How do you identify in terms of your sexual orientation?)
a. Do you use the terms gay, lesbian, or bisexual?
b. What terms do you prefer to use in describing your sexual orientation?

14. How were you raised to think about sexual orientation?

15. Anything else you would like me to know about your sexual orientation?

16. How would your describe yourself to another person?

17. How do you think your ethnic background affected your perception of your sexual orientation?

18. How would you describe your ethnic background?

19. What do you plan to do with your major?

20. Religion? What role does it play in your life? Does it factor into who you tell your sexual orientation to?

21. Experience with professors? Are you or would you be comfortable telling them about your sexual orientation?

22. Have media images played a role in how you construct your sexual orientation?

23. Social Networks? Facebook? What role does those have on what you do?

24. Classroom? Professors? Describe the classroom experience for you?

25. (For graduate students), do you think that being both Asian and GLB impacts your identity? How has it shaped how you perceive yourself?
Appendix D: Summary of Data Collection

<table>
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<th>Interviews</th>
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Fieldnotes and Journals - Total Pages: 17
Appendix E: Index of Coding

1. FOUCAULT
   a. discourse
   b. relationships
   c. truth
   d. knowledge
   e. power
2. DRESS
3. DISCRIMINATION
   a. Straight community
   b. gay community
4. ENVIRONMENT
   a. community
   b. campus
   c. country
5. FAMILY
   a. unmentioned
   b. conceal
   c. coming out
6. FRIENDS
   a. Roommates
   b. conceal
   c. coming out
7. MEDIA
   a. TV, Movies
   b. Social Media
8. PROFESSORS & CLASSROOM
   a. nondisclosure
   b. disclosure
9. RELATIONSHIPS & DATING
   a. ethnic difference
   b. online dating
10. RELIGION
    a. conceal
    b. coming out
11. SELF-IDENTITY
    a. sexual orientation
    b. ethnicity
12. STEREOTYPES
a. Intersections between GLBT/Asian
b. GLBT
c. Asian
Appendix F: Example of Situational Map

Subject A Situational Map
- Korean/Asia, gay – tries to avoid Asian stereotypes (i.e., chopsticks) and doesn’t really have Asian friends

Home country:
- Homophobia
- Feelings of brotherhood
- Stance on the military – “come out as gay and it will follow you”

Dress/Symbols:
- Bracelet—a symbol of his identity? is starting to wear it less now
- Displayed National Coming Out Day ad on his door
- Gay jokes on his door
- Tries not to have other behavior to indicate that he is gay

Family:
- Sister and father: out to them
- Not out to mother, grandparents or other family: does not want to risk identity for them
- At home, raised to think that gay does not exist
- Only male in family tree – he is the only one that can continue the family

Community events:
- Fusion Friday: feels comfortable being out there
- Axis: comfortable place for him to go out

Friends:
- Two relationship – 2 boyfriends
- Use of FB – met a boyfriend on FB, met Rachel (BFF)

Residence Hall:
- Acts of discrimination: what impact do these have?
- Friends, floormates, RA
- Impact of stuff on door to room, bracelet within res hall?

Religion:
- Raised Catholic
- Disillusioned with religion
- Doesn’t talk about sexuality if he hears that someone is Christian even though he has friends that are Christian and he knows that is it not true

Notes:
- Wants to live in Canada or Switzerland (¶ 351)
  - Wants to work for United Nations, be involved with human rights of GLBT persons
- Relationship to other gay people?
- Documents for teaching assistants on GLBT issues
  - Teaching handbook includes section on GLBT students
  - Very small section
- Avoid talking to others about boyfriends/girlfriends if talking about his sexuality
- Stereotypes? Impact on self and power?
Appendix G: Example of Social World/Arena Map
Appendix H: Example of Positional Map

Self identity – degree of agency

- **Sub D**: open to everyone. Solid sense of identity
- **Sub I**: out everywhere, strong sense of identity. Grad student
- **Sub F**: wants to be advocate in Malaysia, not out everywhere
- **Subject E**: bisexual erasure. Does not believe identity would be accepted. Comfortable with self
- **Sub G**: pretty open in US, feel country is more open.
- **Sub B**: Does not want to be advocate, not open everywhere
- **Sub C**: concealing in most discourses. Still learning about herself as pansexual
- **Sub A**: strong sense of agency, not open everywhere
- **Sub H**: Not out to many. Considers acting homosexual and marrying to avoid conflict

Willingness to reveal sexual orientation