

An Investigation into LGBTQ+ Programming and Climate at a Midwest Master's Comprehensive University

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Frederik Meijer Honors College Senior Project

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Background & Purpose

- Between the 1970s and 1990s, queer students attending institutions of higher education were likely to wait until leaving home to come out, sometimes not even recognizing their sexuality until they arrived and had new experiences (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Today, colleges and universities across the country are equipped with resource centers, gender-inclusive housing, gender-neutral bathrooms, and other resources to provide support for LGBTQ+-identifying students. This research seeks to investigate how a mid-sized Midwest master's comprehensive university fosters inclusivity for LGBTQ+-identifying students by exploring its programming and resources and how are these efforts perceived by students.

Theoretical Framework

The following theoretical frameworks were considered throughout this study:

- Intersectionality
 - The theory that individuals hold multiple intersecting identities and the ways in which they intersect impact the lived experiences of the individual (Cho et al., 2013).
- Heteronormativity
 - Assumes that heterosexuality is normal and inherent. Upholds the gender binary system that there are only two distinct genders.
- The Traditionally Heterogendered Institution (THI)
 - Assumes that institutions of higher education are built by and for cisgender, straight individuals. These institutions center straight identity which marginalizes any other identity (Preston & Hoffman, 2015).

Methods

Methods of Data Collection

- Survey responses from 38 participants were collected
 - 7 omitted due to incomplete progress
- Collected data from eligible GVSU students
 - Consent was obtained from each participant before the survey was taken

Methods of Data Analysis

- Grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) and content analysis (Leavy, 2000) to interpret the qualitative data
- Line-by-line coding (Kurasaki, 2000) to establish themes from open-ended questions
- Established connections between themes in written memos

Sample

Criteria for participation

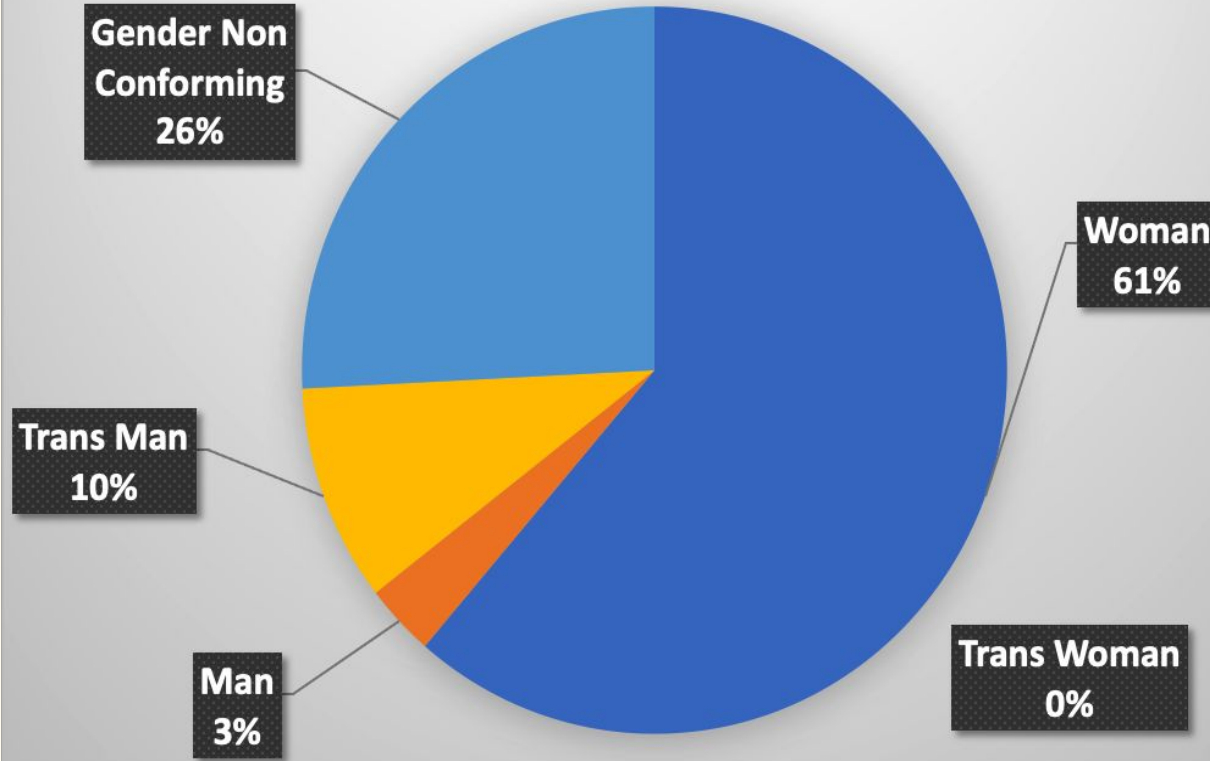
- 18 years or older
- Currently enrolled at the university as an undergraduate or graduate student
- Participants acknowledged that their participation in this study would be voluntary

Recruitment

- An email recruitment message was sent to all students who held a Women, Gender, & Sexuality Studies major or minor, and students who held a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Studies Minor
- A recruitment message was posted in a private facebook group for LGBTQIA+ students and allies at the university

Participant Demographics

Gender Identity



2021 University Enrollment:

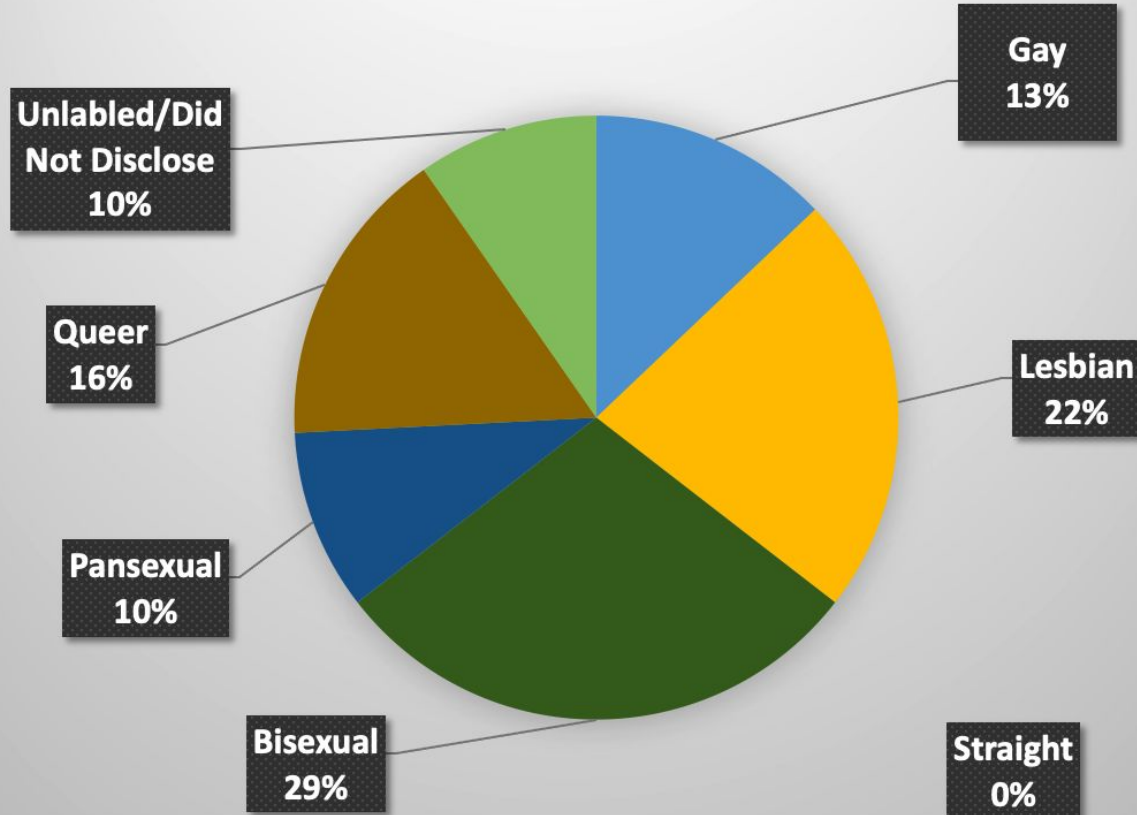
- 62.4% female*
- 37.4% male*
- 0.1% unreported

**University only collects data about “male” & “female” gender identities*

2019 Climate Survey:

- 59.55% female
- 26.69% male
- 2.95% GNC/Transgender
- 17.92% unreported

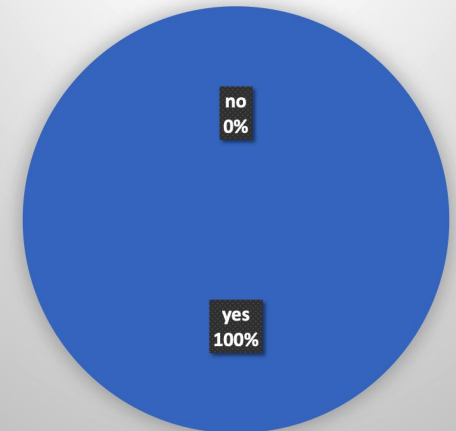
Sexual identity



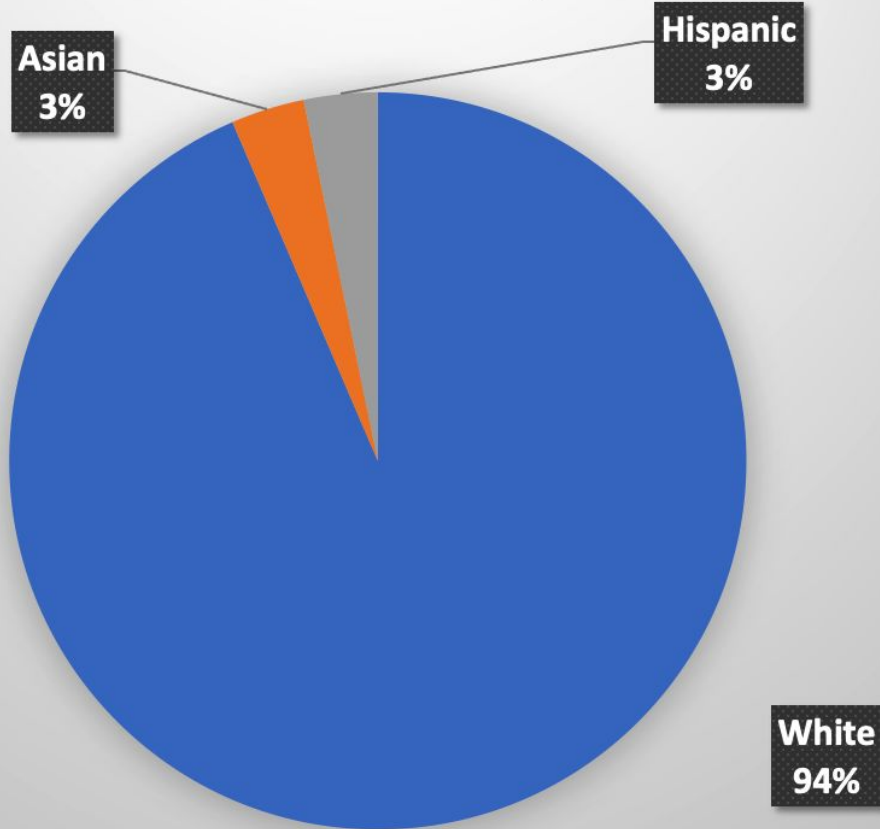
Current University Statistics:

- University does not collect data about the sexual identity of students.

LGBTQ+



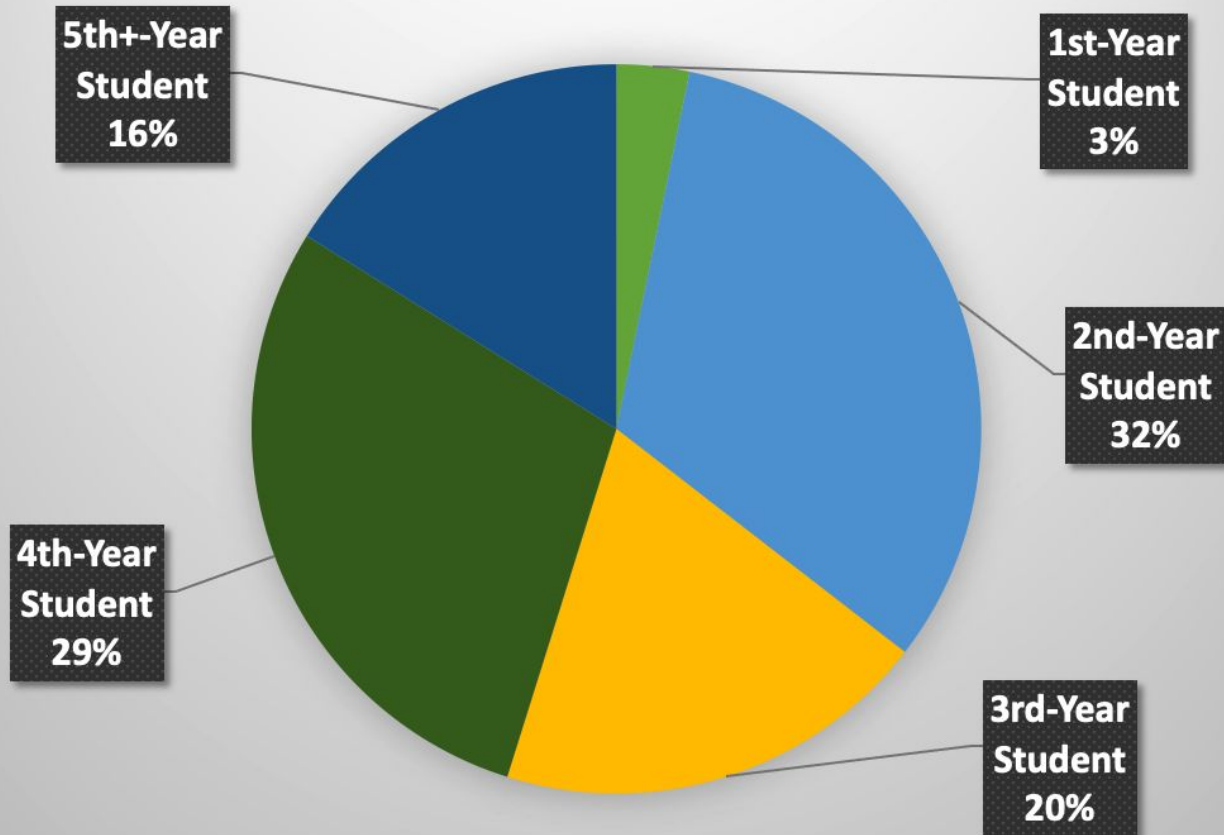
Ethnicity



2021 Enrollment:

- 81.6% white
- 5.7% hispanic/latino
- 4.4% black
- 3.6% Multiethnic
- 2.4% Asian
- 0.3% American/Alaskan Native
- 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- 1.9% International/Unreported

Student Status



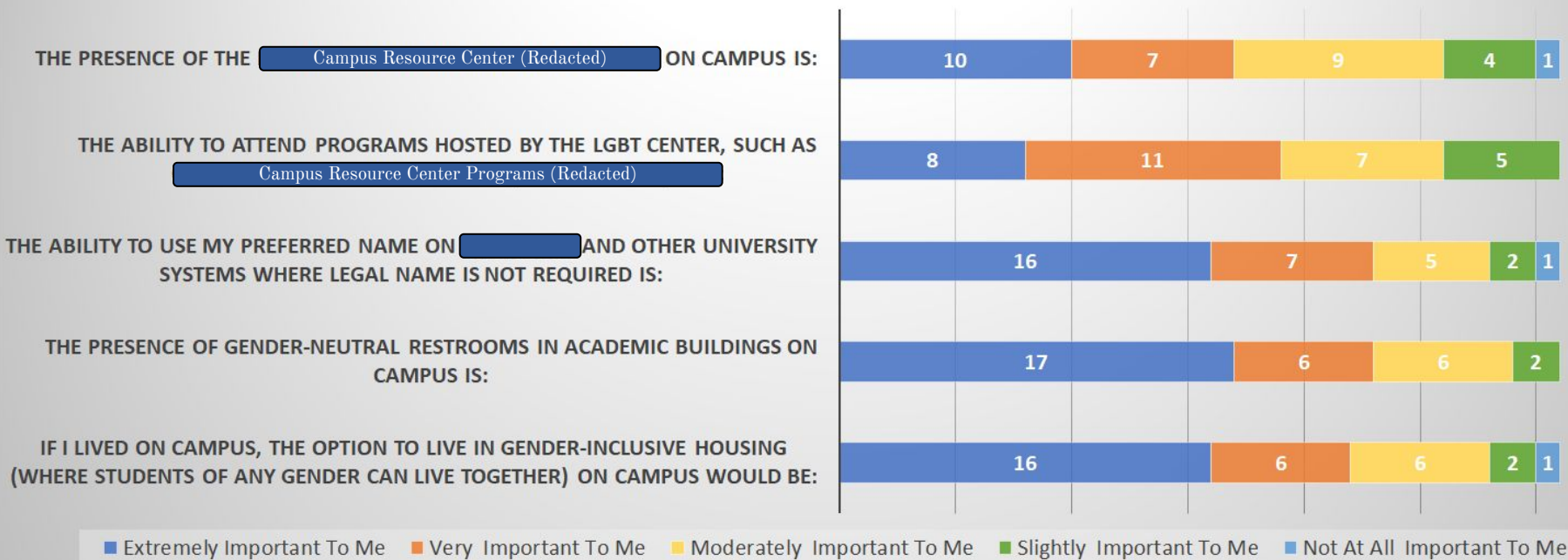
2021 Enrollment:

- 1st-Year: 18.8%
- 2nd-Year: 18.1%
- 3rd-Year: 19.9%
- 4th-Year: 29.7%

**University does not collect data about 5th-year+ student status*

Findings: Engagement with LGBTQ Resources & Programming

Relevance of Resources for LGBTQ+ Students



- Overall, it can be generalized that all resources available at this institution are beneficial and important to the students who use them. The most important resource for these students is the presence of gender-neutral restrooms in academic buildings on the campus.

**Note: Official names of the resource center, programs, and university systems were redacted*

Findings: Open-Ended Responses

- If you are currently utilizing LGBTQ+ resources and programming on campus, which resource is the most beneficial to you, and why?
- Do you experience any barriers to accessing and utilizing LGBTQ+ resources and programming on campus?
- Are there any additional LGBTQ+ resources and programming that you think are beneficial to the inclusion and equity for LGBTQ+ students?

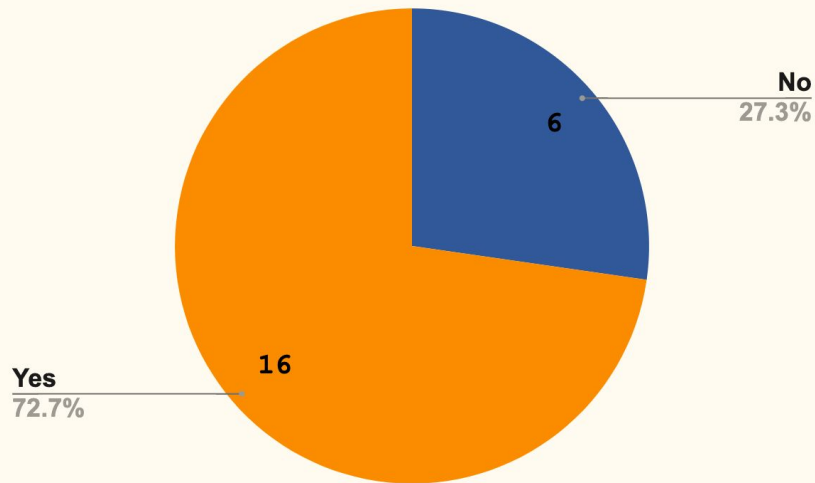
Which Resource is the Most Beneficial to You?	
LGBT Resource Center	4
Gender-Inclusive Housing	2
Staff Knowledgeable in DEI & Queer Issues	2
LGBTQ+ Counseling Services	1

Why?	
Meeting & Building Community	2
Identity Expression	3

Notable Response

The LGBT center has provided me with support and friends I never would've met otherwise. The main reason I'm at [University] is because of the Center! I literally don't know if I would be alive if I didn't have their support and love

Do you experience any barriers?



Which Barriers Do You Face?

Misunderstanding of Unique/Intersecting Identities	7
Time Conflicts	5
Limited Advertisement	2
Limited Options Available	2
Intimidating	2
Concerns for Safety	1
Access (Transportation, physical space, etc.)	1

Notable Responses

Also I have noticed a difference in what cis-LGBQ students need/want, and what trans or non-binary students need/want in terms of resources and support. I don't find the social support I need on campus, but most LGBQ people I know have no problem making friends or engaging in other grand valley programs and activities where I still feel ostracized and misgendered.

Yeah there is no program for lesbians or gay men and I don't think I fit into [LGBTQ-focused Program]

Yes, it did not feel welcoming to me as an older student

Are There Any Additional Resources and Programming that You Think are Beneficial?

Additional Programming	8
Staff Training on Inclusivity & Facilitation of Queer Spaces	2
Pronouns in University Systems	2
Additional Advertising	2
More Opportunities for Students with Different Identities	1
Programming for Queer Students Who Are Not Out	1
LGBTQ-Specific Facilities (Restrooms, Gyms, Sports, Community Spaces)	1

Notable Response

More training for staff, specifically staff who are in male dominated fields. Queer and trans people are business majors, math majors, engineering majors, etc. and often get dismissed by their professors. Many LGBT+ people also struggle or are living with mental illnesses and learning disabilities, and getting accomidations without expensive doctors papers is hard in those fields as well

Discussion & Conclusion

Major Points

- Queer students benefit from the five main types of resources offered by the university: the resource center, programming, preferred name system, gender neutral restrooms, and gender-inclusive housing
- This project confirms the notions of Preston & Hoffman (2015) that harmful power structures and discourses built upon heteronormativity continue to affect queer students as their experiences can be invalidated and systems in place make them feel ostracized and marginalized by the institution and their peers.

Takeaways

- Further research could investigate specific ways to increase accessibility and evaluate if implementation of the participants' suggestions would be beneficial to the greater queer community on campus.

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