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Investigating the Experiences of Queer International Students

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INVESTIGATING THE EXPERIENCES OF QUEER INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

There is a great deal of academic literature reporting homophobic discrimination against queer students in higher education. However, queer international students, who have potentially experienced different cultural constructions and understandings of sexualities based upon their cross cultural international studies, have received little to no attention in academic literature. This is significant considering the increasing number of international students studying in Canadian universities. In light of this, this research examines the self-described experiences of seven queer international students attending one Canadian university in order to investigate their experiences as queer identifying subjects. Drawing on their voices, it also attempts to examine the level of queer acceptance or homophobic discrimination in their Canadian university. The seven students all reported impressions of Canada and their Canadian university as being more accepting of sexual minorities than their home countries. As the study explains, these perceptions ultimately incited a degree of reflexivity in how the participants' came to understand and make sense of their queer identities. These included changes in self-labeling of their sexual identities, self-understanding and perception of their sexuality, expressions and embodiments of their sexuality, being open with their sexuality in different cultural contexts, and finally a more optimistic reframing of their potential futures as queer individuals. These findings draw upon queer, feminist, and gender theory that offer an understanding of the social construction of gender and sexual identities, seeing identities as relational processes that can change in different cultural spaces. In light of these findings, further research into institutional systemic support offered by universities for queer international students is proposed.

Keywords: international queer students, study abroad, identity changes, internationalization, cross cultural

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Aims & Purpose

While conditions for individuals who are queer have improved in recent years, the queer community still faces many difficult instances of discrimination that can cause individuals to feel fear or shame surrounding their identity. One important place for movements counteracting any of these potential negative experiences for queer people is in higher education, where queer university students often leave home and become more independent, allowing them the freedom to explore their sexual identities (Rhoads as cited in Kumashiro, 2002). In this way, universities have the potential for being places of positivity that embrace their queer student population. This has been the case for many universities which now offer queer related programming (Carlson, 1998), yet problems still remain as there are still many reports of rampant homophobia in higher education (Renn, 2010; D'Augelli, 1992; Filax & Shogan, 2004; Tierney & Dilley, 1998; Rankin, 2003; Longerbeam, Inkelas, Johnson, & Lee, 2007; McKinney, 2005; Beemyn, 2005). This variance in support or negativity on campus is understandable considering the nature of higher education with its semi private status and governance over regulatory conditions, meaning that there is no stipulated consistency regarding official queer student support systems on campus. Within Canada, however, there is a greater cultural and political framework of laws that protect the human rights of queer citizens, such as those pertaining to Canada's legalized same sex marriage and anti-discrimination laws (The International Lesbian and Gay Association [ILGA], n.d.a). This basic framework becomes important in the realm of higher education in light of education's burgeoning internationalization process that brings many international students to campuses, creating a diverse student population in higher education with a mixture of

both domestic and international sexual minority students. As enrolment of international students in higher education is rising (Welch, 2002; Williams & Johnson, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2011), the experiences of these international queer students and the campus climate that they live in remain unexamined and under-researched (Renn, 2010).

Queer international students who come to Canada to study may be coming from diverse ethnic backgrounds as they travel from different countries with different cultural histories. These countries may also have different cultural and political frameworks that construct sexual minority identities in certain ways that may contrast with Canada's construction of and value placed on ensuring sexual minority rights. Indeed, it is believed that cultural contexts have the ability to alter perceptions and understandings of sexuality in different times and places (Herdt, 1993). This means that an international queer student could potentially have a different experience, understanding, or identity related to queerness than a domestic queer student might have. This may be especially true considering the homophobic political frameworks and cultural attitudes prevalent in certain countries from which international queer students are coming, including Jamaica, Guyana, and Qatar that condemn homosexuality as both illegal and immoral (Mintz, 2013; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007; Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre, 2010; Itaborahy, 2012; Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013; United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2001). Therefore, coming to Canada to study has the potential to initiate profound experiences for international queer students in terms of how they negotiate their queer identities in the host institution’s new cultural and political environment. In light of these potentially drastic changes for queer international students, it is important to attempt to acknowledge and understand their experiences as queer international students during their study abroad.

Indeed, it is made even more important considering there has been a significant amount of research finding a high level of homophobia and harassment directed towards queer students in general on North American college or university campuses (Renn, 2010; D'Augelli, 1992; Filax & Shogan, 2004; Tierney & Dilley, 1998; Rankin, 2003; Longerbeam et al., 2007; McKinney, 2005; Beemyn, 2005), alongside a lack of research and investigation into the experiences of international queer students and their experiences with their queer identity on host campuses (Renn, 2010). The implications of potentially homophobic climates at universities and the unexamined effects of the changing contextual surroundings and positionalities of queer international students could mean that if international queer students are experiencing any discomforting interactions or homophobia on campus these negative experiences possibly are not being addressed. Therefore, in the movement for educational spaces to have presence and acceptance of queer students in general, it is important to learn more about the ways in which international students are experiencing their sexual and cultural minority identities to ensure that there is equal acceptance and support for the positionalities of international queer students.

Investigating the experiences of queer international students can contribute to knowledge needed to provide support and to create a more welcoming and supportive environment for queer international students in higher education, at the same time as contributing to a better understanding of the various ways in which queer sexualities can be embodied and experienced or lived. As such, this study examines the experiences of a finite number of queer international students. Its goal is to illuminate how the structures in place in a specific university within the Canadian political and cultural context affect what it may be like for these students to experience this double minority of international and queer student in their study abroad journeys. The intention is not to generalize and make a statement about the quintessential experience for an

international queer student, but rather to begin to build knowledge about how international queer students from different political contexts negotiate their queer identities in one specific university context in Canada. Its purpose is to build deeper understanding about the complexity and negotiation of queer sexual identities for individual international students, and lay groundwork for further research.

1.2 The Research Questions

My research questions were deliberately broad so that the queer international student participants could have some control over the direction of the study in ensuring that what they felt was important to their experiences could be included. Broad research questions allowed the participants to bring up their own topics of importance related to their identity that I may not have predicted and therefore not included in the study's framework. However, I did attempt to ground these experiences by introducing certain topics such as homophobia, differences in cultures and laws in home and new countries, social integration, and institutional support that were considered relevant to queer and international student issues in general, given my reading of the available literature (Tierney & Dilley, 1998; Rankin, 2003; McKinney, 2005, Brekke, 2014; Guo & Chase, 2011; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2002; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2008; Beck, 2013; Marginson & Sawir, 2011; Longres, 1996) . In its most basic sense, my research sought to answer the question of how international queer students felt about their experiences navigating and merging with the campus and the queer community in their host country, focusing on how they embodied or expressed their sexuality in a new or different cultural environment/context and their perceived success or failure in doing so. The driving force behind this study was the need to address whether queer international

students felt safe and welcome in their host university, and what could be learned about how they express, negotiate, and navigate their queer identities in the Canadian university context where there are publicly articulated policies and practices that are designed to explicitly protect the rights of queer and LGBT identifying individuals in general (Renn, 2010).

Inside a framework of allowing the interviewees to contribute their own perspectives on experiences relevant to their queer identities and how they navigated those identities in a new educational environment, the following research questions were formulated:

> What are the experiences of international queer-identifying students in one specific Canadian university? How do they negotiate and navigate their sexual identities in this context?
>
> To what extent are their experiences in higher education in Canada different from their expectations and their experiences as queer individuals in their home countries?

In light of the participants' reports, this study attempted to answer these questions and to examine the experiences of the international queer student participants by analyzing their constructions, deconstructions, and reconstructions of their queer identities in consideration of their changing cultural and political environments in the host higher education context. These research questions were an important basis for building knowledge about the changing conditions under which international students who are queer come to understand themselves as sexual minority subjects. Students' reception and perception of acceptance in both Canada and at their host university provided the foundation for a deeper analysis of the various reformulations of their queer identities that constituted a fundamental part of their experience as queer international students.

1.3 Investment and Positioning

I have some personal investment in this project in that my hope to contribute anything to a more welcoming and recognized university space for queer international students can relate to my own positioning as a former international student. In particular, I saw some difficulties faced by my international student friends who queer identified. They faced instances of discrimination, difficulty finding queer social communities, concern over how their sexualities would be embraced in that culture, and concern over where they could express their sexual minority identities. This led me to suspect that this could have been an issue for queer international students in many different locations, in spite of what services may be available for the broad queer population in schools. This sentiment motivated my research as I hope that it will contribute to improving incoming international students' environments so that queer international students can feel more comfortable and confident in their surroundings, or at least find a voice to express their experiences.

In terms of reflexivity I do have to acknowledge that from these experiences I speak from a sensitive and suspicious standpoint in terms of homophobia and inequality, and I had to be mindful not to project expectations of similar experiences upon student reports during this research. Indeed, I also come from a vested standpoint in believing that alternate sexualities should be accepted and embraced in society, meaning my hope for the academic environment is to have a society in which queer international students both want to and are not afraid to be vocal and forthcoming about their orientations. This feeling is definitely embedded in the framework of this study as I held cultural and political environments up to this standard, although I in no way pressured the participants to reveal their sexualities on campus. I must also mention my vested interested in my research as I want to work with, learn from, and potentially aid queer international students as I hope to work administratively with international students in the future.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study of how international queer identifying students experience the university context in one particular Canadian university engaged with themes of identity and its cross-sections in terms of how cultural norms and sexuality intersect. As such, queer and gender theory acted as an appropriate theoretical foundation. Queer and gender theory, with its social constructionist positioning, pushes the boundaries of sexual and gender identities, going so far as to question identity itself. Queer theorists have also addressed the temporal and spatial nature of identity roles such as gender and sexual orientation, seeing culture as a strong force in shaping normative identities (Herdt, 1993; Wilchins, 2004). Indeed, queer and hetero sexualities "can change in meaning and sociopolitical value in different historical and cultural contexts", and it is logical to "assume that because same-sex acts have different cultural meanings in different historical constructs, they are not identical across time and space" (Jagose, 1996, p. 9). This particular framework for understanding gender and sexual identity as constructed within specific cultural and historical contexts is an important framework for the study, and is elaborated on below. Firstly, it is useful to be familiar with common normative perceptions of gender and sexuality in society that rest on essentialism in order to understand the opposing constructionist view that queer theory espouses and that I have adopted for this study.

1.4.1 Conceptualizations and Constructions of Gender. The way most people in society today understand gender and sexuality is through conceptualizing it as opposing pairs. Derrida, as referenced by Wilchins (2004), has an understanding of modern thought that can help explain the positioning of normative constructs of sexuality and gender. Derrida argues that Western thought focuses on difference in its attempt to understand the world, and subsequently prioritizes the splitting of concepts into opposing binaries (Wilchins, 2004, p.40). He argues that

this way of thinking pervades how many people think about and make meaning, and indeed helps shape the way in which gender and sexuality are perceived and understood in society. This means that gender is seen as an opposing and mutually exclusive binary of male and female, and sexuality is seen as mutually exclusive heterosexual and homosexual (Wilchins, 2004, p. 40). The repercussions of this dimorphic understanding, however, means that such individuals who may be considered in between these gender or sexuality categories such as feminine men, masculine women, or the androgynous are considered outsiders of the heteronormative binary gender and sexuality system. Wilchins (2004) articulates this by explaining the binary system as "opposing halves that between them exhaust all meaning. Binaries treat the world like a pizza on which you're only allowed to make one cut. Anything that doesn't fit one half or the other gets lost, squeezed out" (p.40). Indeed, she claims that:

> With gender, we create the meaning of *woman* by excluding anything that is non-Woman and vice versa for Man. We form idealized templates for what is perfectly masculine or perfectly feminine by excluding whatever doesn't fit; the queer, the different, the mixed[.] (p.36)

Peterson (1998) also acknowledges the exclusionary nature of the gendered binary system and claims that the Western thought founded upon binaries "involves a politics of identity which is premised upon either/or distinctions, and leads to the repression or denial of difference and the marginalization of those who do not conform to narrowly prescribed roles" (p. 22). This can mean that those outside of the dichotomized male/female binary and those who fall outside of the common LGBT label may not easily find a societal place or identity that is understandable and respected in society. It is important to note that this understanding of society's dimorphic conceptualization of gender also presupposes that gender is indeed conceptual and subject to

societal beliefs and ways of thinking, which points toward theories of gender as a societal construction.

Theorists who hold a social constructionist view, however, believe that gender is socially constructed and context specific, meaning that normative gender is created, shaped, and mediated by people under certain conditions and governed according to the influence of certain institutional norms as opposed to nature. Instead of believing in a stable and 'natural' sex that exists prior to birth into the world and subjection to society, social constructionists believe sex is formed and imposed on an individual by society where "identity is fluid, the effect of social conditioning and available cultural models for understanding oneself" (Jagose, 1996, p. 8). According to Peterson (1998), "social constructionism usually refers to the project of exposing *historical* processes whereby sexual categories are created, thereby challenging the belief that categories of human behaviour are 'natural', pre-determined by biology, genetics, or physiological mechanisms" (p. 34). Indeed, citing Laqueur, Peterson (1998) argues that "'sex, as much as gender, is made', and is very much a product of post-Enlightenment science which has focused on sex differences" (31). He sees both anatomical sex and the perceivable presentation of gender as both socially created, based upon historical ideals that evolved into the current hegemonic belief of binary sex and gender. To help illustrate his view, Peterson (1998) looks at cultural phenomena such as gender blending in which a biologically sexed individual mixes both commonly associated masculine and feminine traits. He claims that gender blending:

> has demonstrated both the arbitrariness of the link between physical sex and social gender and the significance of cultural assumptions about male and female physical characteristics, appearances and behaviours in ascriptions of gender. […]Such examples of gender 'passing' challenge the cultural logic that the physical body is the site of an

> authentic intelligibility and expose the essentialism that is often the foundation of identity politics. (Peterson, 1998, p. 32)

To him, the fact that any gender, including a mix of gendered characteristics, can appear on both biological males and females indicates that there is no essential nature in sex that would dictate a corresponding gender identity. By rejecting essentialism and the idea of a stable and static gender identity in this analysis of category breaking gender blending, Peterson illustrates that gender is something that can be shaped, formed, or altered by context and the social world.

Wilchins (2004) compounds this belief in the societal construction of gender by pointing to the historical progression and gradual changes in society's conceptualizations of or models for understanding gender and sexuality. She points out that in contrast with the current dimorphic model of gender, there have even been historical moments in which it was fully believed that there was only one gender in society, with a non-category changing variant between males and females akin to what it means to "come with an inny instead of an outy" (Wilchins, 2004, p. 117). This stance is also held by Peterson (1998) who references work of Laqueur which makes reference to the pre-Enlightenment belief that the "vagina is an inverted penis and the uterus an inverted scrotum" (p. 31) in a one sex model to point out how perspectives and understandings of gender and sexuality change contextually through time. Such a change of thinking regarding gender sheds light on the extent to which understandings of gender need to be understood as culturally and historically specific constructions (Wilchins, 2004, pp. 93, 122). In fact, certain cultural and social norms influence the way in which gender and sex are understood and how they are embodied or expressed bodily.

Judith Butler (1990), for example whose book *Gender Trouble* is considered to be one of the most prominent books in queer theory (Jagose, 1996, p. 83), also holds this view of gender's

cultural construction. Butler (1997) asserts that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (p. 402) and that "the body is understood to be an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities, a complicated process of appropriation" (p. 403). To her, "gender is in no way a stable identity of locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1997, p. 402). These 'stylized repetitions of acts' consist of "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds [that] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1997, p. 402). In this, Butler rejects the essentialist view of an innate source of gender identity, looking instead at culture and historical pressures that influence how a person becomes gendered. Butler believes that with this influence, learned gender is then continually appropriated on the body in a performance through various gestures according to the norms governing how gender is understood in that particular place or time. Indeed, Butler (1997) further claims that culture is a strong force in influencing gender presentation when she writes:

> The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one's act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that on does it *in accord* with certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individualized matter. (p. 409)

In differentiating influence not only from within one own person's idiosyncratic ways of presenting their own gender but also from culture, Butler emphasizes the role culture and environment can have on producing certain gender identities and categories. This stance of believing that gender is a social construction shaped through culture and enacted through

continual performance is a useful foundation of understanding for this study that has addressed the interplay of different environments on gender and sexuality such as the foreign university in relation to experiences of international queer students.

Wilchins (2004) articulates this social constructionist stance in another way, critiquing the notion of a concrete and stable "real" gender by discussing how biological women who enact and portray their femininity do so in the same ways in which female transgendered biological men enact and portray femininity**.** Articulating her theoretical stance, Wilchins (2004) cites Butler in saying "Perhaps 'there is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is … constituted by the very "expressions" of gender that are said to be its results'" and builds upon her argument by claiming that "'Being' a gender is always a *doing*, a continuous approximation of normative ideals that live outside us and were always already there before we arrived" (p. 131). Wilchins (2004) sees the evidence of this by looking at the practice of cross dressing and drag. The perceivable actions and appearance are the same, and therefore to her, "woman is to drag – not as Real is to Copy – but as Copy is to Copy. Gender turns out to be a copy for which there is no original. *All* gender is drag. All gender is queer." (p. 134). This reflects a similar line of thinking of Butler's (1997) when she articulates the constructed nature of sex and gender through analyzing transvestite performances. Building upon her claim that gender is a performance, she argues that:

> if the 'reality' of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express. Indeed, the transvestite's gender is as fully real as anyone whose performance complies with social expectation. (Butler, 1997, p. 411)

Such stances that consider performance and theatricality cornerstones of how society understands and perceives gender necessitates a belief that gender has a strong grounding in and is mediated by the social world. Theories and perspective such as these reject the essentialist discourses of gender and sexuality that suggest there is one unified and concrete definition of what it means to be gendered or express desire (Petersen, 1998, p. 40) and instead embrace a social constructionist view of gender and sexuality that I also adopt for this study. This constructivist stance toward gender informs this study's basis as it analyzes the ways in which the international queer students' sexual identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed according to their social, cultural, and political surroundings.

1.4.2 Conceptualizations and Constructions of Sexuality. Gender and sexuality, while separate ideas, are theorized as having a strong theoretical connection. This common connection is a complicated one, believed to be based upon pervasive hegemonic forces in society. While there is no direct and causative relation between gender and sexuality, gender is theorized to be enmeshed in societal discourses on sexuality, and particularly heterosexuality. Butler (1990) refers to this complicated connection as the 'heterosexual matrix'. Theorizing the origin of sexuality and gender, Butler (1990) looks at historical practices of exogamy and the incest taboo on the regulation of socially sanctioned identities and desires, claiming that:

> Because all cultures seek to reproduce themselves, and because the particular social identity of the kinship group must be preserved, exogamy is instituted and, as its presupposition, so is exogamic heterosexuality. Hence, the incest taboo not only forbids sexual union between members of the same kinship line, but involves a taboo against homosexuality as well. (p. 99)

What connects this historical desire for linear and genealogical production has made both incest and homosexuality a taboo, consolidating heterosexuality as the socially sanctioned sexuality and encouraging people into embracing heterosexuality within a productive binary gender system. Butler (1990) continues by quoting Rubin, who writes that:

> A prohibition against *some* heterosexual unions assumes a taboo against *non*heterosexual unions. Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that a sexual desire be directed toward the other sex. The sexual division of labor is implicated in both aspects of gender – male and female it creates them, and it creates them heterosexual (180)'. (p. 99)

This means that gendered identity and heterosexuality become a form of 'labor' as Rubin puts it, in which genealogical productivity necessitates a strong social sanction on both identifying as male or female within this heterosexual matrix, and directing sexual desire towards the binary opposite sex. Butler summarizes Rubin's claim in her own argumentation by claiming that:

> the regulated cultural mechanism of transforming biological males and females into discrete and hierarchized genders, is at once mandated by cultural institutions (the family, the residual forms of 'the exchange of women' [in exogamy], obligatory heterosexuality) and inculcated through the laws which structure and propel individual psychic development. Hence, the Oedipal complex instantiates and executes the cultural taboo against incest and results in discrete gender identification and corollary heterosexual disposition. (p. 100)

What this means in terms of gender identity is that although heterosexuality and cis-gendering[1] are not considered a "natural" and guaranteed phenomenon, there are strong social sanctions that

[1] A cis-gendered person experiences, expresses, and identifies as a gender that matches their biologically assigned sex (Singh, 2012).

promote sexual desire between binary sexual genders, effectively shaping or pressuring individuals to conform as a binary male or female heterosexual person. Considering the strength and pervasiveness of this taboo and sanction of the 'heterosexual matrix' then, it is understandable that its influence complicates gender and sexuality of those outside of it, including those attracted to the opposite sex or transgressing gender roles. Indeed, according to Butler (1990), "not to have social recognition as an effective heterosexual is to lose one possible social identity and perhaps to gain one that is radically less sanctioned" (p. 105). As genealogical production in heterosexuality is believed to produce normative gender, when normative heterosexuality is transgressed it is theoretically possible that so too normative gender may also be affected. It is with this understanding of the social pressure on connecting sexuality and gender as oppositional in the 'heterosexual matrix' that the current state of connectivity between gender and sexuality can begin to be approached.

Similar to gender's theory of social construction, sexual orientation is also believed to be constructed in society and often based upon the ways in which gender is portrayed. Theorists believe there is a strong connection between the perception of gender and the perception of sexual orientation, and that the presentation of one can influence the presentation of the other. Youdell (2005), for example, argues that in modern times gender is inextricably linked to the presentation of sexual orientation, arguing that "sexuality is framed by and is a component of the gender that is performed[, calling] into question the plausibility of severing the connection between gender and sexuality" (p. 249). Butler further argues that "desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire" (Butler, 2006, p. 31). What this means is that gender presentation as theorized by Butler as a performance also has connections to sexuality, which can become inextricably linked and molded within that gender presentation. Sexual

orientation and its perception are layered upon and merged and often determined by the perception and portrayal of gender (Wilchins, 2004, pp.14, 30). As sexuality and gender are considered to be based upon social sanctions in the heterosexual matrix, it is possible to see gender and sexuality as a cultural pressure that is learned and subsequently performed. In a similar vein to this idea of social sanction and performativity in the heterosexual matrix, Wilchins (2004) questions:

> Is all minority identity a kind of learning, anchored not just in bodies and culture but in the process of imitation and the performance of who we're supposed to be? Just as one teenager learns to act black, another learns to butch it up or act gay, while another learns to look real and pass as a woman. (p.116)

Perhaps then stereotypes of gender transgressing homosexuality become one example from which individuals learn how to perform what they consider to be an intelligible culturally established identity for their own sexuality. For example, Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) analyze how gay male sexuality is portrayed, connecting gay stereotypes to the reading of the feminine on individuals' bodies (p. 79). Indeed, they claim that some boys are "able to choose not to disclose [their] sexuality, while other boys do not appear to readily have this choice due to the fact that they embody masculinity in non-normative ways" (Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 80). While this suggests an inability to control these performances for some, it does suggest that there is a perception of what is queer that is socially understood and that through performing and reading masculinities and femininities, portrayals, perceptions and inferences about sexuality can also be made in society. This theory of gender and sexuality as socially constructed combines with ideas about their social, historical and temporal relativism, and is an important grounding to my study of international students that investigates the queer

international students' different definitions and presentations of sexual orientation and gender presentation/embodiment/expression within different contexts.

1.4.3 Gender and Sexuality According to Culture. Queer theorists believe that there have been various understandings of gender through time and across cultures. While there may be drastic temporal differences such as in the current two sex model and the historical one sex model mentioned above (Wilchins, 2004, p. 117), variability can be seen in different cultural contexts as well. Similar to Wilchins who discusses this one sex model of the past, Herdt (1993) discusses current differences of gender understanding across cultural lines. He discusses variants of gender systems that focus on three sexes and genders that are naturalized and considered 'normal' outside of the Western world's current two sex model conceptual system, including the androgynous Hijras in India (Herdt, 1993). In fact there are numerous examples like these, such as the Hua people in the Eastern Highlands of Papa New Guinea. In their culture, people are not judged exclusively as sexed based upon their genitalia, but also through "the amount of certain male and female substances they have in their bodies which are thought to be transferable between individuals through eating, heterosexual sex and everyday casual contact" (Peterson, 1998, pp. 32-33). However, alongside Herdt's (1993) study of these historical and cultural roles, Herdt presents the view that cultures have the ability to construct meaning and define gender throughout time (pp. 52, 81). He argues that sexual dimorphism is being consistently and widely challenged by academics (Herdt, 1993, p. 53), and believes that "variations in sex and gender, including the formation of third-sex and third-gender categories, roles and ontological identities are not universal; they vary across time and space" (Herdt, 1993, p. 79). Indeed, some Western thinkers believe that "even if the 'sexes' appear as binary in their morphology and constitution, there is no reason to assume that genders ought to be restricted to two" (Peterson, 1998, p. 30) in

thinking outside of current Western societal conceptualizations. It is understandable that variant models of gender can be normalized across cultures considering that culture, and even popular culture, guides our perceptions of what makes appropriate and inappropriate gender roles (Rodriguez, 1998, p. 183). However, beyond gender, there is also variance across and within cultures in terms of how binary constructed sexualities are perceived and portrayed.

How society construes and perceives what it considers to be appropriate and "normal" gender and sexuality can vary from culture to culture. This also connects with gender's relativity as often transcending gender norms can be read as a signifier of homosexuality (Wilchins, 2004, p. 15; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003, p. 79), and is complicated in conjunction with Herdt's (1993) assertion that gender can be perceived of differently in various cultural and temporal locations. Indeed, Britzman (1998) reviews arguments of Patton who discusses HIV in relation to various sexual practices and perceptions of sex abroad, ultimately claiming that "Patton makes the significant point that travelers perform sexuality differently in different spaces. Her term *sexual landscapes,* or the geographies of sex, signals something about the polyvalency of the traveler's body and something about the polyvalency of cultural meanings" (pp. 63-64). Herdt (1993) and Britzman's (1998) presentation of Patton's arguments suggest that there may be something different in the reading or understanding of queer identity in the crossing of cultural borders. This makes sense considering Herdt's (1993) position that genders are normalized and mediated differently in different cultures, meaning normative versus transgressive genders are complicated in the crossing of cultures and subsequently the reading of sexuality may be affected. In relation to my study then, international queer students may not necessarily construe gender or sexuality in the same way in which a queer domestic student might construe it. Considering all of these influences that help construct different understandings of gender and

sexuality, queer theory becomes integral to a study such as mine in order to step out of not only the Western normative heterosexual/homosexual binary, but also in taking consideration of how various cultural and temporal constructions of gender can impact sexual identities and roles.

1.4.4 Heteronormativity. When discussing culturally relative forms of gender and sexuality systems it becomes apparent that in these societies there is a sexual or gender norm. In many cases, this norm is an expectation of dimorphic genders and a heterosexual orientation, an expectation that queer theory denotes as 'heteronormativity'. Heteronormativity encompasses the belief that heterosexuality is expected and considered default and normal, or in other words heterosexuality is the Centre in the heterosexual/homosexuality binary (Wilchins, 2004, p.41). Indeed, Peterson (1998) claims that to many, "heterosexuality is seen as 'innate', determined by reproductive demands, evolutionary strategies, or the natural differences in the physiology of men and women" (p. 34). All of these perceptions mean that heterosexuality is expected and considered natural, a construal however that also creates a place of privilege or hierarchization over other sexualities. Kumashiro (2002) writes of the heteronormative situation by claiming "mainstream U.S. society often privileges heterosexuality by defining it as the way people naturally are or the moral way to be, while defining other sexualities as queer, as illnesses, and, in many places, as crimes" (p. 82). This means that sexuality outside of this heterosexual standard expectation then, is considered abnormal and alternate, or an "Other". In Kumashiro's (2002) words, those who are or are perceived to be queer are Othered as they are "often defined in opposition to groups traditionally favored, normalized, or privileged in society, and as such, are defined as other than the idealized norm" (p. 32). Yet it is important to note that within this heteronormative construction with heterosexuality as the 'normal' and expected default in comparison to the deviate and 'Othered' homosexuality, there is an added element to

heteronormative expectations that can be considered oppressive or coercive, especially noticeable by those who are not heterosexual (Peterson, 1998, p. 35). The coercive nature of heteronormativity is sometimes labelled as compulsory heterosexuality, and according to Peterson (1998):

> Heterosexuality has been described by some feminist writers as a 'compulsory' or 'obligatory' institution into which men and (especially) women are 'coerced'. They are coerced, it is claimed, through a variety of forces such as rape, child-marriage, sexual harassment, oppression of homosexuals, pornography and economic sanctions. [In fact…] many gay people share with radical feminists the premise that the dominant heterosexual order is maintained through sexual violence and the threat of violence. (p. 35)

While drastic experiences such as those listed above are definite instances of oppression of homosexual people, it still remains that even the subtle nature of the heterosexual/homosexual binary with its normalization of heterosexuality can create strong oppressive forces on those who are not heterosexual or cis-gendered. This understanding of the power of heteronormativity is an important contextual background for analyzing the experiences of queer international students in this study who have mediated differing levels of acceptance and homophobia in various environments. Taking account of the destructive privileging of heterosexuality of heteronormativity and the resultant marginalisation of those outside of it, queer theory also stands to reject heteronormativity through questioning the function and place of normative identity categories in that heterosexual/homosexual binary.

1.4.5 Identity - Gender and Sexuality Roles. One of the main goals of queer theory is the subversion of society's normalization of gender and sexuality roles. Queer theory rejects the

male/female and heterosexual/homosexual conceptual dichotomies, hoping to negate oppression of those who do not fit easily into these prescribed roles. Jagose (1996) sees queer theory as a theory that disrupts:

> received understandings of identity, community and politics [and…] problematizes normative consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality – and that, consequently, is critical of all those versions of identity, community and politics that are believed to evolve 'naturally' from such consolidations. By refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal. (p. 99)

Queer theory is a theoretical standpoint which evades precise definition (Jagose, 1996, p. 1), in that it that not only pushes borders of normative gender and sexuality roles, classifications and identity categories by rejecting traditional genders and sexualities that are organized around a conceptualization of identity categories as stable, fixed unitary constructs, but continually and consistently subverts or "*queers"* the very existence of normative roles and identity categories in general. According to Tierney & Dilley (1998), "queer activism seeks to break down traditional ideas of normal and deviant, by showing the queer in what is thought of as normal, and the normal in the queer" (p. 60). In essence, my relation to queer theory is primarily concerned with its ability to break categorizations and expectations of gender and sexual identity. This is useful, not only in relation to understanding domestic queer students that may break from society's normalization and hierarchy of male/female and hetero/homosexual structuring of identity, but also those queer international students who also come to campus with international queer identities that may contrast with those norms governing how a domestic queer student might be understanding gender expression and sexual identity.

It is also important to note that queer theory is not only concerned with breaking down gender and sexuality related identities, but with breaking down identity categories themselves completely. Queer theory locates the problem of oppression more broadly than one that relates just to impacting on the esteem of LGBTQ identifying persons and works beyond merely attempting to further the popular LGBT agenda for rights and recognition. Instead, queer theory critiques the heteronormative system of identification as a whole, as queer theory sees identity as a normalizing discourse that seeks to constrain and reify personal characteristics. According to Carlson (1998):

> in its more subversive form, queer theory actually is one more variation on a poststructural theory of the self that is deeply suspicious of all identity categories, viewing them as (at least in part) regulatory mechanisms of the dominant culture, involved in locating the self within binary oppositional power relations and within the rigid boundaries or borders that police difference. (p. 113)

He continues to assert that, "the effect of such a reduction of self and others to categories of identity is the subversion of our right to be treated as 'unique' persons rather than according to labels or categories" (Carlson, 1998, p. 111). Therefore, one of the fundamental aspects of queer theory is the rejection of the compulsion to define one's self within the normalized and reified identity roles and categories offered up by society for people with certain fixed or static gendered or sexualized qualities, such as, but not limited to "female", "male", "gay", "lesbian", "bisexual", "transgender", "dyke", etc. Indeed, with its poststructural grounding, queer theory goes so far as to suggest that true identification within this system is actually impossible. This is because identification is considered a process that is ever changing, situationally specific and consistently relational to other consistently changing and relational categories and norms governing creating

understandings about sexuality and gender (Jagose, 1996, pp. 79, 82; Sumara & Davis, 1998, p. 197). Indeed, according to Kumashiro (2002), "identities and characteristics of groups are difficult to define, since the boundaries of groups are constantly shifting and contested, which means that any attempt to describe a group can simultaneously function to prescribe what it means to belong to that group" (p. 37). Subsequently, another one of queer theory's functions is to help individuals linguistically avoid pressure to conform as the term 'queer' itself acts as an umbrella term available to those who do not wish to define themselves with predefined sexual and gender categories and according to the norms that narrowly define what it means to be gay or express 'acceptable' forms of gender expression (Jagose, 1996, p. 1). Queer theory is useful to this study as it attempts to break down expected gender and sexuality identity categories and heteronormative systems of thought governing how gender and sexuality come to be defined and understood. This theory is a good foundation for engaging with international students themselves regarding their own definitions and realities of being queer in whatever materialization that may be, as opposed to predefined Western frames of reference.

1.4.6 The Nature of Oppression. As queer theory provides the basis for understanding the mechanics, constitution, and negotiation of identity as a complex, fluid, and mediated process, it is also important to focus on the external pressures people face contextually in that system of identification. The pressure and compulsion to identify according to normative roles or identity categories can be related to the idea of oppression, and often result in negative experiences for those sexual and gender minority subjects who do not conform to the dominant heteronormative systems' conception of legitimate gender and sexuality expression/embodiment. Attempting to explain oppression, Wilchins (2004) again draws on Derrida who discusses the idea of the centre. In dichotomies, such as the male/female and heterosexual/homosexual binary,

one element is invariably hierarchized over the other and constituted as normal or default (p.41). Wilchins (2004) claims that:

> because it sets the terms of discussion, the first term of the binary acts as a centre that is insulated from being questioned. Thus we endlessly debate the meaning of Woman but not Man, homosexuality but not heterosexuality, blackness but never whiteness, transgender but never *normal* genders. (p. 41)

In particular, in terms of gender and sexuality, this means that heterosexuality and normative genders become seen as the natural and the default, while those non-normative individuals who may fall under queer are projected and separated as an Other (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 82). This directly relates to Kumashiro's (2002) definition of oppression, in which "oppression is a dynamic in which certain ways of being (or, having certain identifications) are privileged in society while others are marginalized" (p. 31). The oppression and harassment faced by queer youth contributes to the fact that they are cited of being as of high risk of suicide, violence, dropping out of school, and self-destructive behaviour (de Castell & Bryson, 1998, p. 247; D'Augelli, 1992, p.392). However, it is of note that this oppression is not experienced in the same ways by everyone. Certain individuals can experience oppression from a number of different sources and in different ways relating to their various subject positions (Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 66). There are still more efforts needed to address oppression experienced by those with multiple identities and to acknowledge their oppression without constricting them into roles of commonly oppressed individuals (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 38). My research attempts to do so through interacting with queer international students to discover if they experience oppression that is not being addressed in the main anti-homophobic movement on campus. By enacting queer theory that rejects constrictive and normative identities, my study hopefully allows for a

clearer picture of how international queer students regard their own sexuality and gender expression on campus.

1.5 Thesis Overview

The aim of this thesis was to learn from international queer students how they have perceived and experienced their queer identities in the context of an international move as they study abroad, as well as to discover how they felt received by their particular Canadian university in terms of acceptance or homophobia. Chapter one has explained in detail the rationale and the research questions that have motivated the study's undertaking, as well as the conceptual framework that has guided the research.

Chapter two is a literature review that provides an overview of the academic research that has informed this study. This background research has revealed a lack of research investigating the experiences of queer international students in general (Renn, 2010), which further indicates the importance of this study in attempting to fill a gap in the academic literature.

In Chapter three, the methodological framework structuring the research undertaken in this study is explained. As the primary goal of this research was to allow international queer students to clearly dictate in their own words what their sexual minority identities meant to them in their various residential contexts, this chapter explains the methodological approaches chosen to best meet this goal. It also overviews precisely how the data were collected and analyzed before the formal writing of the thesis.

Chapter four provides contextual backgrounds of the international queer student participants in the form of participant profiles that are important for the following chapters. This background is provided through presenting the students' relevant characteristics, the political and cultural contexts of each student's home country from which they are coming, as well as the

Canadian laws and cultural outlooks into which they have moved. The participants' perceptions of their home cultures, the Canadian culture, and the Central University campus that they attended in Canada are also included.

The results of the study are presented in Chapter Five that overviews the analysis of the participants' interview data. This analysis is broken down into themes that relate to the international queer students' perceptions and reformulations of their queer identities after their change of cultural and political surroundings. Following this chapter, Chapter six concludes the thesis and discusses the significance of the research and its implications for further studies.

1.6 Conclusion

The amount of research that has indicated the prevalence of homophobia within education (Renn, 2010; D'Augelli, 1992; Renold, 2000; Filax & Shogan, 2004, Martino & Pallota-Chiarolli, 2003, Reygan, 2009; Tierney & Dilley, 1998; Rankin, 2003; Longerbeam et al., 2007; McKinney, 2005; Beemyn, 2005), as well as the lack of research undertaken that has addressed the experiences of queer international students (Renn, 2010), highlights the need for attention towards this minority group in academic literature. There are stark difference in queer acceptance or discrimination that can be experienced in various countries based on political and cultural outlooks (Mintz, 2013; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007; Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre, 2010; Itaborahy, 2012; Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013;United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2001), especially considering the differing ways that sexuality can be expressed or constructed within different cultural or temporal contexts (Herdt, 1993; Wilchins, 2004; Kumashiro, 2002). In light of this, international queer students are in a unique position as they experience this change in cultural and political surroundings, and their experiences may be drastically different

than a domestic queer student in Canadian universities. There is a need for research that explores these potentially unique experiences for both further understanding of queer and internationalization theory, as well as acting as a litmus test to ensure that Canadian universities provide support for queer international students during this adjustment. Utilizing a queer conceptual framework that acknowledges sexual identities as fluid and socially constructed as well as shaped by cultural norms (Herdt, 1993; Jagose, 1996; Kumashiro, 2002; Britzman, 1998; Butler, 1997; Peterson, 1998; Wilchins, 2004), as well as a failure of identification processes to adequately represent a person in all places and at all moments in time (Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1997; Carlson, 1998; Kumashiro, 2002; Wilchins, 2004), and a theory of oppression as being an institutional rather individual issue (Kumashiro, 2002; Wilchins, 2004), this research is intended to contribute to this under researched area.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There is limited research that directly delves into the experiences of queer international students during their studies abroad. There appears to be some research that investigates social identities of international students besides issues involving their racial or ethnic background. More broadly, however, in the realm of queer studies, there is significant research on the homophobia experienced by queer students in general. Surprisingly, the one place where I did find recognition of the difficulty that queer international students may face abroad was in non-academic travel guides and in brochures designed to aid outgoing LGBTQ students in preparing for their overseas studies. This indicates that there is need for queer international students' experiences during their stay to be more thoroughly examined in academic research, especially given that a focus on this population has not received significant attention in the research community. As my research draws from literature that deals more broadly with international students, I have provided a brief overview of significant studies in the field and illustrated how they relate to and inform my research study.

2.2 Gender in Study Abroad

International students and their experiential consequences of that identity abroad in relation to traditional gender, in a somewhat similar vein to queer identity, have had some academic research attention. Jessup-Anger (2008) references Grewel & Kaplan who assert that international students conceive of a narrow cultural ideal of their gender based on their home countries and do not necessarily conceive of the ways in which gender is socially constructed (as cited in Jessup-Anger, p. 361). Indeed, Grewel & Kaplan assert that this narrow view of gender

may limit international students' ability to understand and conceive of alternate embodiments of gender in their travels (as cited in Jessup-Anger, 2008, p. 361). In her research, Jessup-Anger (2008) interviewed 9 of 28 American students going on an international school trip to New Zealand. Her subjects reported that there was no formal school support for mediating between culturally different perceptions of gender nor an acknowledgement of how gender may influence studies abroad at all (p. 361, 365). She also found that these students did not consciously examine how gender affected their lives, yet still reported gendered experiences of sexual harassment and sexism while choosing to mentally subdue the experiences rather than consciously engage with them (p. 365).

Twombly (1995) also contributed a significant study to interrogating studies abroad and their connection to gender. Twombly's research consisted of interviews of 21 American students studying abroad in a South American college and reported that for women, gender had a significant impact on their study abroad as they sometimes felt objectified by resident men and isolated from resident women with an inability to connect or relate to their cultural embodiment of femininity (as cited in Jessup-Anger, 2008, p. 362). While focusing more on gender and how it intersects with race, Talburt & Stewart (1999) are one research team who contributed to the generally under researched area of gender dynamics of international study with their ethnographic study of a five week international school trip to Spain. They discover experiences of some American female international students who, like those questioned by Twombly, often faced sexual harassment and isolation due to being racial minority females in a new environment (Talburt & Stewart, 1999, p. 169). These studies, while diverging from the area of queer studies have similarities to my study in that they address socially influenced identity markers of international students and how they relate to new environments and, therefore, have been useful

resources for my study in terms of formatting and methodology.

2.3 Homophobic Discrimination in Education

The necessity of research on queer international students' experiences becomes clear when research on gender conflict in studies abroad is investigated in addition to research on homophobia in North American schools. There are numerous studies on sexual orientation and heteronormativity that have been published, including an article by Renold (2000) who found that children internalize homophobia and navigate the pressure of heteronormativity as early as primary school. Similarly, Filax & Shogan (2004) give voice to homosexual and gender non-conforming youth and their experiences with schooling, often citing their inability to easily concentrate in school due to bullying. In addition, in 2003, Wayne Martino and Maria Pallota-Chiarolli published research analyzing the experiences of queer male youth. They reported stories of harassment and homophobia directed towards boys who did not identify as heterosexual and who were not hegemonically masculine in school. Investigating youth aged 16-25 in the Dublin school system in 2009, Reygan found that:

> The majority (n = 19) of respondents [(n=25)] reported experiencing problems in school related to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity; eleven (n = 11) respondents reported that homophobia impacted negatively on their studies while at school; and one fifth of respondents (n = 5) left school early, citing negative reactions to their sexual orientation or gender identity as one of the main reasons they left. The majority (n = 18) of respondents did not consider their school a safe space to be LGBT. (p.80)

Indeed, it appears that in primary and secondary education spaces for LGBTQ students can be a difficult place. Unfortunately, this difficulty is also associated with older queer students and even adults in undergraduate and graduate education.

There is a dearth of literature on queer students in higher education that investigates their experiences and emotions surrounding issues such as homophobia and harassment (Renn, 2010, p. 134). Climate studies such as these are useful for quickly gaining a relative understanding of how accommodating or difficult a campus may be for its queer students and faculty, and are also appreciated for their efforts to hold educational systems accountable for their campus environment (Renn, 2010, p. 136). There have been numerous studies at various universities with most reporting a poor campus climate for queer students, where homophobic sentiments were even stronger than racial or gender intolerance (Tierney & Dilley, 1998, p. 49). Indeed, this could be related to the fact homophobia is considered particularly intense in education as it is attributed to be a conservative and reactionary field (Pinar, 1998, p. 2).

Rankin (2003) completed one of the most recent wide scale climate studies, showing in depth the disparaging campus conditions for queer students. Out of fourteen universities and colleges in United States, 719 LGBT undergraduate students, 281 graduate students, 372 staff, 150 faculty, and 95 administrators completed a survey questioning their homophobic experiences, beliefs regarding LGBT perceptions on campus, and their campuses' queer related policies and actions (Rankin, 2003). She found that in the previous year 29% of respondents had been harassed about their sexual identity (p. 26), 19% had experienced fear due to their LGBT identities, and some 51% (60% of students exclusively) had kept their sexual orientation hidden out of fear of harassment or conflict (p. 24). Respondents who identified as transgender in this survey had higher rates of harassment at 41% and those that were open about their sexuality experienced more harassment than those who were not (Rankin, 2003, pp. 25-27). These instances of harassment included elements of derogatory remarks both vocal and written, threats,

homophobic graffiti, pressure to hide their sexuality, and even physical assaults (Rankin, 2003, p. 28).

There were many other issues brought forward in climate studies such as Rankin's beyond merely homophobic harassment. For those respondents in Rankin's (2003) study who identified outside of the white majority, race was also an issue of concern. Queer students of a minority race commented that they felt uncomfortable in venues consisting mostly of ethnic heterosexual people, as well as in white queer spaces (Rankin, 2003, p. 25). Indeed, minority raced queer respondents claimed that services directed at LGBT students on campus were not properly suited to their needs, and that they felt LGBT spaces at their universities were places for white people (Rankin, 2003, p. 30). Indeed, Renn (2010) sees this lack of attention to queer students of a minority race even in academic literature, as few studies address the intersection of sexual orientation and race and most assume a normative, white, able-bodied queer student (p. 135).

Rankin's 2003 investigation unfortunately showed little improvement from an earlier wide scale climate survey undertaken by D'Augelli in 1992. D'Augelli (1992) found in a series of anonymous surveys of faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students at a major state university in the United States between 1987 and 1990 that 75% of gay men and lesbians were verbally harassed, 25% were threatened with violence, and 64% felt fear regarding their sexuality (D'Augelli, 1992, pp. 384, 391), a situation only slightly worse than those portrayed in Rankin's 2003 study above. A result of this harassment and fear can be high emotional stress, as well as social and academic difficulties for these campuses' queer population (D'Augelli, 1992, p. 393).

Queer students' feelings of fear indicated in Rankin's and D'Augelli's climate surveys are likely grounded when the outlooks of heterosexual identifying higher education students are investigated. Longerbeam et al. (2007) reference a study by D'Augelli and Rose in 1990 that found 29% of straight first year students felt that their educational institutions would be improved if only attended by heterosexual students (p. 216). They also report a 1997 Malaney, Williams, & Gellar study that found 25% of a randomly selected group of students felt that there were prevalent anti-LGB attitudes on their campus (Longerbeam et al., 2007, p. 216), indicating that many university campuses are truly homophobic and heteronormative places. This information, including the situation reported by queer students of a minority race in Rankin's aforementioned study, suggest the need that campus climate needs to be improved on a major scale, especially perhaps for international students who may not share the same race or cultural background as the majority.

While queer higher education students experience a high degree of harassment in general, transgender students face their own unique set of complications going to university inside a heteronormative world. McKinney (2005) completed a study on these very issues by asking self-identifying transgender students what they considered the climate of their university campus and how well received they felt by their institution. Of a total of 65 completed surveys, no students' universities had anti-discrimination policies that included gender expression, and only 33% had an LGBT centre on their campus (McKinney, 2005, p. 67). A similar article by Beemyn (2005) researched issues surrounding trans students experiences on campus, discovering that the majority felt isolated and marginalized on campus. She expounds on many particular areas including health care where campus health care professionals are often insensitive and ignorant of trans issues, exclusively binary gender options are available on forms, and university health

plans that cover neither hormones nor reassignment surgery (Beemyn, 2005, pp. 78-79). Residence halls were also an identified source of problems as most residences are set up as single sex whereas trans students are cited as preferring single housing (Krum, Davis, & Galupo, 2013). This sexed segregation includes volatile places such as showers and bathrooms in which students have reported harassment and fear of questioning or even legal ramifications of transgressing gender separations (Beemyn, 2005, pp. 80-81). This is a similar situation on campus, as facilities such as campus bathrooms and locker rooms are also single sexed. The result is that some trans students actively avoid participating in campus recreation, physical education classes, and even using washrooms to their own physical detriment (Beemyn, 2005, p. 82).

Issues that trans students experience extend beyond sexed campus facilities and into the very organization and administration of campus institutions. There is also evidence that trans individuals feel there is a lack of role models in visible trans faculty and administration, a lack of support from the institutions in the form of trans friendly groups or initiatives, and difficulty changing or altering academic transcripts to differing sexes or names (Beemyn, 2005, p. 85). These intense structural deficiencies of universities to provide an adequate and stress free environment for trans students reflects the heteronormative state of many North American campuses. These studies highlight that there are significant barriers to an enjoyable student experience that need to be addressed in higher education, and in combination with the lack of literature on international queer students this study should be beneficial in filling a gap in the literature. While all of these climate studies focus on North America, there is sufficient evidence that situations may be just as bad or worse in some overseas countries depending on their cultural and religious values and their official laws and policies (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013; *Deutsche Welle* "Sexual Minorities", 2013; Barsotti, 2013).

2.4 Queerness in Context of the 'Home' Country

Another important element to a queer international students' experience in a Canadian university is the environment from which they have temporarily moved, including attitudes, policies, and laws surrounding homosexuality and gender identity in their home countries. While the specific home countries of the participants of this study are addressed more in depth in chapter four, it is beneficial to take a summative glance at the variations in queer acceptance in different political 'home' environments of international queer students. There is a spectrum of political and cultural positivity and negativity in various countries, with countries like The Netherlands, Canada, and Argentina that have legalized same sex marriage, countries which have recently legalized or are in the process of doing so, including Brazil, England, and certain states in America (BBC, 2013), as well as countries such as Iran, Jamaica, Uganda and other African and Middle Eastern nations in which homosexuality is treated as an illegal and immoral sickness and Iraq where homosexual acts are in some cases punishable by death (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013).

Countries with extreme homophobic laws and official discourses such as those in the Middle East and certain African nations are plentiful. Moreover, in Jamaica, for example, where there is no anti-discrimination law against sexual orientation or sex/gender expression, the Jamaican Prime Minster approves of the criminalization of same sex sexual acts, and politicians commonly engage in homophobic speech. It is not surprising that homophobic violence in the country is rife with little to no police response (Jamaica Forum for Lesbians, All-Sexuals and Gays, Women for Women, Heartland Alliance for Human Rights and Human Dignity, International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission [IGLHRC], AIDS-Free World [AFW], & The George Washington University Law School International Human Rights Clinic, 2011). Outside of the Caribbean, in Africa, Uganda is one example of a country with a harsh

official environment for queer people. In February of 2012, Uganda tabled the "Anti-Homosexuality Bill" in which the Ugandan parliament proposed the criminalization of same sex sexual activity at the penalty of life imprisonment or death, $2,650 fines or 3 months in prison for parents who do not denounce their gay or lesbian children or a teacher who does not denounce their pupil, 7 years imprisonment for any landlord offering housing to a gay or lesbian individual, and the shunning and ruining of reputations of medical professionals who assist gay or lesbian populations including those who do work with HIV, sexual and reproductive health, and counselling over lesbian and gay issues (Sexual Minorities Uganda, 2013). Besides Uganda, homosexuality is also criminalized in African countries such as Ghana and Egypt (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013). Beyond stress inducing homophobic environments, these have severe official laws that sometimes even issue death penalties for queer individuals (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013).

Considering these stressful and tense environments for queer people in various countries around the world, it is understandable that such conditions may have an effect on the motivations and expectations involved in studying abroad. If a queer individual is living in a country with severe oppression for queer individuals, it is possible that this could even induce migration abroad in the form of international study to allow a safe and openly queer lifestyle. Such a change of official discourse from one of condemnation and hate in some of these countries to a more, at least officially, accepting and supportive one in the Canadian university context can be a big change for some international students. Determining the goals, experiences, and expectations of a queer international students' study abroad in terms of how this change could impact their negotiations of their identity in relation to their new environment in this study can be a benefit to the academic and theoretical literature.

Even outside of official legal discourse, discriminatory cultural outlooks and perceptions of queer people can be severe. For example, in a master's study by Ikizler (2013) of 12 queer Arab students in an American university, it was revealed that many felt a cultural pressure that made life as a queer individual difficult. These included cultural pressures not to discuss issues surrounding their sexuality, to be conservative and quiet about any encountered problems outside of the norm, and not to dishonour their family in a culture in which homosexuality is not tolerated (Ikizler, 2013, pp. 4, 26). Other issues they experienced were fear of violence towards them if they were to come out, complications and conflicts between their sexuality and their religious beliefs, navigating expectations upon them to marry and create families, and worrying about causing a negative impact on their sister's future marriages if they were to reveal their sexuality (Ikizler, 2013, p. 6). While each country has its own individual political and cultural understanding and climate surrounding homosexuality, it is clear from the wide range of fights for equal rights and stresses upon queer individuals that there is still a strong sense of heteronormativity and varying levels of oppression in many countries. These studies surrounding the perception of homosexuality on campus and internationally are arguably clear evidence that homophobia is enough of a problem to warrant studies on its effects, suggesting that homophobia may also encroach upon the lives of international students and their experiences should be investigated.

2.5 Social Supports

International students, whether they are facing difficulty with their sexuality or not, are reported to face wider difficulty integrating into host campuses with few official social supports from universities. Research by Guo and Chase (2011) cites "a lack of support to help international students successfully integrate into Canadian academic environments" (p. 316),

while Beck (2013) claims that only 47% of Canadian universities do offer social support systems for international students (p. 45). This is unfortunate when researchers like Marginson & Sawir (2011) assert that social engagement "offers the potential for genuinely mutual exchange and greater global awareness in the student population [and that] all students derive cognitive, social, and civic benefits from diverse interactions on a sustained basis" (p. 99). Indeed, Longres (1996) published a book that looked directly at the experiences of LGBTQ individuals who were of a visible racial minority and asserted that there must be social and support services available to those who cross-identify as both queer and of a minority race, subsequently identifying various issues related to counselling a variety of specific ethnicities. Many of these aforementioned studies come close to investigating international students and queer issues in the manner that I have done so here, but none make a direct connection that frames this study.

2.6 International Queer Student Support

There are various non-academic literatures which acknowledge the significance of queer identity for international students. Many North American universities provide online knowledge of queer issues for outgoing international students in order to promote safety and enjoyment of the student's sojourn. Universities such as Michigan State University, The University of Iowa, and Indiana University among others, all provide online resources that include overviewing the laws of homosexual behaviour in various countries, the differing acts through which same sex individuals may express same sex attraction versus friendship camaraderie in various cultures, and warnings regarding "coming out" and revealing sexuality in some less politically accepting countries, etc. (Michigan State University, 2013; The University of Iowa, n.d.; Indiana University, n.d.). One of the best of these resources I encountered was that offered by Indiana University, which had a separate NASFA Association of International Educators affiliated

support system. This system provided resources for both outgoing queer international students and educators and administrators helping LGBTQ students preparing for their sojourns. These links included many of the resources I have outlined above, as well as various travel guides indexed by country discussing supportive organizations, health resources, gay friendly events, and online social communities for queer residents of that country. Most interesting to my purposes is their small but profound student report section that includes diary type entries from international students who discuss their experiences as queer identifying individuals. Within these two entries there are reports of encounters with homophobia and a sense of isolation from both hetero and homosexual peers (Anonymous, 1999). Reports of difficulties and deficits with the support community for international students such as these are exactly the reason I have attempted to give voice to queer international students in my academic research.

2.7 Conclusion

As there is an absence of any formal study that researches international students in connection to queer identity, my research attempts to fill this hole in the literature. This study investigates in depth the short-term temporal experiences and understandings of queer identity that the international queer student participants experienced during their studies abroad, differing from queer themed travel documents and specific cultural analyses of homosexuality. I believe it is academically beneficial to acknowledge and attempt to explain how queer identifying students may adapt to new environments and how their sexuality can be presented and received in host institutions. This research project will hopefully illuminate what it has been like for the international queer student participants of various ethnic backgrounds in their new immersions into North American culture and to the academic community. Understanding the lives of queer international students such as those interviewed is a part of the internationalization process in

universities that should be acknowledged, and could be of some use and interest to the academic community in regards to social justice and internationalization policy.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of and justification for the methodological approach that I used to frame this particular study. In its most basic level, I chose to adopt a qualitative methodological approach for the purposes of this research. A qualitative framework is suitable because I am first and foremost interested in the feelings and experiences of queer international students as opposed to merely quantitative information about them. Qualitative study is regarded for its ability to give depth and detail to issues studied as well as provide a clear picture of subjects' point of view (Patton, 2002, p. 14), ultimately getting a better grasp on their perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 12) and providing subjects with an opportunity to voice their own understandings (Patton, 2002, p. 348). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2000), "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality [and] the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, […seeking] answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning" (p. 10). For the purposes of my study, the qualitative approach that stresses subjective understanding shared by the researched is a much better choice than the alternative quantitative studies that are claimed to deny subjects' the ability to direct research, ultimately subduing their voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 9). A qualitative methodology fits soundly with the broader goals of my research -- a thorough study of a few individuals to glean understanding of how international students may experience their queer identity, and what that identity means to them in a Canadian university context. This qualitative standpoint garnering individual understanding on experiences also meshes well with its epistemological standpoint.

This study also rests heavily on an interpretivist epistemological standpoint with its subjectivist understanding of knowledge, believing that "social facts, even ways of thinking and observing, are social constructions rather than objectively and universally true" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 5). My study necessitates this approach as I believe that these international students have a subjective understanding of the world that has value and should be analyzed. In particular, I was focused on each diverse and subjective relationship to queerness and homophobia in the international students' experiences in light of their various cultural backgrounds, opposed to studying a positivist and objective conceptualization of how homophobia is singularly and concretely present in universities. I was primarily interested in the relativity between cultural understandings of what it means to be queer and how that could create a different experience for different types of students in university for a few select participants, necessitating this interpretivist approach.

3.2 Interviews

Interviews were selected as the sole method of data collection because it is the most direct and personable way of obtaining the international queer student participants' reflections on their personal experiences. Indeed, interviewing is seen primarily as a means of seeing and learning about the perspective of a subject that is valued and considered meaningful (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Furthermore, I believed that the quotations and reports from the respondents would endow my study with the ability to provide thick descriptions of the students' personal feelings and emotions that I sought to understand and about which I was concerned to build further knowledge (Patton, 2002, p. 21).

In order to enhance the subjectivist nature of my investigation that asked for participants' particular understandings of international queer identity, I also strongly felt that the interviews

should be semi-structured with many open ended questions. I believed that this format would hopefully encourage the study's participants to be able to inform me of their experiences and subjective insights, as opposed to me directing pointed questions and therefore defining what they saw as relevant for their experiences with gender and sexuality. My stance was that open-ended questions would be better than alternatively deciding questions before the interviews that would have had me predetermining what was important to queer international students' lives (Patton, 2002, p. 21). However, there were certain sensitizing issues I was focused on exploring, such as homophobic abuse experienced by students, their perspectives on university support available to them, and how they felt they could relate to their peers. This made a semi-structured approach with a few opening standard questions and an interview guide likely my best option. Interview guides were a useful method to me in this situation as they provided me with a focus on campus climate in relation to international queer students' identities in a consistent framework that would more easily allow data synthesis, while leaving enough freedom to allow both me and the student to explore various subjects at differing depths in order to hopefully gain the students' own perspectives and priorities (Patton, 2002, pp. 343-344). This also made the interview appear more informal, which I believed to be an important part of keeping the conversation open and relaxed for interviewees who were discussing sensitive issues.

My intentions with the study initially were to engage in interviews with both queer international students and university staff. My hope was to interview staff who work with and who are involved in the support of international students, including staff at international student resource centres and those that administrate and promote exchanges in order to determine what formal aid is available to queer identifying international students. However, while I was able to interview some staff, time and accessibility restrictions meant that there was not enough data to

successfully add their input in the study. Instead, the international queer students' interviews remained the sole data source for the research. I do not intend to generalize my findings to the entire queer international student community but instead have attempted to focus on the diversity of queer social construction and experience for a handful of students. In order to do this I framed the study to be participant focused and felt I needed a minimum of three student participants. I received an unexpected amount of interest and included seven international queer student participants in the study before I decided to end the recruitment process.

Utilizing the interviews I attempted gather personal anecdotes and feelings from the international students regarding their on campus experience as well as descriptions of methods of support that they had received from international student support staff. Technically, I also audio recorded the interviews with the participants' consent. During the interview I made notes of overt physical expressions that I perceived, physical movements such as shrugs that would not be recorded on the audio track, and any particularly important points that the participant appeared to be emphatically emphasizing. I did invite most of the interview students to contact me after the interview was completed if they felt they had anything else important to add to the study, whether it be forgotten anecdotes or information more easily communicated through distance and in writing, but none of the students did so.

3.3 Recruitment

My first step in gaining access to interviewees was emailing potential participants by looking up staff and contact emails on university websites. I sent emails to staff members or organizers of the queer group on campus, the queer library, and international student services in multiple departments. These emails invited the staff members to participate as support personnel and also ask their help in garnering international student participants by requesting they display a

poster advertising the study in their offices. These emails, along with an additional email sent from a professional contact who knew one of the potential participants, successfully made contact with and resulted in interviews with two staff members. These included a representative from a smaller department's international exchange centre on the university campus, as well as the leader of a queer ally support group. Though their interviews were successful, enjoyable, and informative, I did not perceive the small amount of staff interview data sufficient to inform analysis of the support personnel. Due to strict time implications and the insufficient data, these interviews were not included in the study. I received replies to my email from the main international student centre agreeing to display a recruitment poster and requesting further details of the study. They did not reply to this second email which I perceived to be a declination of participation. I also received a reply from the leader of the university's queer organization agreeing to participate, but in numerous email exchanges we were unable to find a time to meet and eventually the individual stopped replying, indicating he had declined to participate. I also sent emails to the university's ethnocultural officer, queer library, and other individuals within the international support centre and did not receive a response.

For the international queer student participant group, using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), I posted recruitment flyers around campus that outlined the details and requirements of participating in the study, along with my contact information and the offer of a ten dollar coffee shop gift card. These flyers resulted in much contact through email from interested parties. However, after clarifying participant requirements of having been living outside of Canada for a significant period of time before coming to study, many of these people did not meet criteria to participate. Unfortunately, the first respondent's interview took place before the individual's past history arose, and her interview was deemed inadmissible as she had lived in Canada more years

than she had lived abroad and did not meet participant criteria. However, recruitment through these flyers did result in successful contact with and interviews of three of the final participants. The other four participants were recruited through the snowball effect as existing participants spread knowledge of the potential study to people that eventually chose to participate (Patton, 2002). After seven viable queer international student interviews were completed, I believed there to be enough data to attempt to continue the study into the data analysis phase. I removed the flyers from campus and informed the few people who contacted me later that the study was full and thanked them for their interest.

During the recruitment process, I also attached a copy of the study's letter of information in the emails to the potential participants in order to explain the details of the study. They kept this electronic copy and also signed and initialled a second paper copy that we discussed in person at the interview. I kept this signed paper copy for my records. In these emails, I also offered a choice of either ten dollar Starbucks or Tim Horton's coffee shop gift cards that were offered to the participants as a thank you for participating. The students indicated their choice either in email or during the interview. Only one student declined the offer of the gift card and said that he was happy to help and advised me to save it for another participant.

3.4 Data Analysis

The first step in analyzing data was transcribing the interviews and confirming their validity and correctness with the participants. After completing all of the participant interviews, I used the audio recordings to transcribe our conversations. I used pseudonyms in order to protect confidentiality, and labelled these interviews electronically and on the printed hard copies using their home country names. In the case where there was more than one student from one country, I also included their type of degree to differentiate participants. After completing these

transcriptions, I sent a copy back to the participants through email so that they could check that they were correct and comfortable with the quotes that would be included in the study. Five out of seven students did not respond to this email which I took to mean there were no issues with their data, and one student provided in person confirmation of its acceptability. One student requested that I send him a consolidated file with only the portions of the interview that I was going to use in my data analysis. I did so, and the lack of reply indicated to me that it was acceptable to use these portions. Once completing the steps necessary to transcribe and approve the transcripts, I then moved onto the data analysis phase and began working with the data.

The data analysis portion of my study examined personal anecdotes and opinions of interviewed queer international student participants in order to reveal how they felt received on campus and how they negotiated their queer identities in the Canadian university context. Subjectively, their experiences were the most fundamental part of the study. Therefore, I endeavoured to provide a context rich and direct report of their experiences, with less formal interpretation of their stories on my part. In order to do this, I used data analysis grounded in the interview data.

I attempted to code the interview data by theme and pattern, as I hoped to concentrate on queer international student perspectives and experiences within the overarching context of a Canadian university climate that were common between the participants. According to Patton (2002), “content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings[, …] often called patterns or themes” (p. 453). As it was paramount for the purpose of my study that the queer international student participants' individual and potentially unique experiences of queer identity within a Canadian university context be maintained and conveyed,

I felt an indigenous approach to coding was most suitable. According to Patton (2002), “A good place to begin inductive analysis is to inventory and define key phrases, terms, and practices that are special to the people in the setting studied and finding what indigenous categories the studied people create to make sense of their world” (p. 454), also known as *in vivo* coding. In this case, the core consistencies and themes that I discovered in the data were the various issues and insights that queer international students found important in their negotiation of their gender and sexual identity on a foreign campus during their time abroad. This was influenced by the contextual background themes of perceptions of their sexuality in their campus and their home countries that I pursued through use of the interview guide.

Themes targeted by the interview guide revolved around topics of perceived homophobia and acceptance on their Canadian campus, in their home countries' campuses, and institutional support on campus. These predefined themes, or sensitizing concepts, help researchers find how a particular concept is manifest and what meaning it is given for various groups of people (Patton, 2002, p. 456). These themes, overviewed in the profiles chapter, ultimately became important contextual background information that informed the broader experience of the international queer students in terms of their identity, which make up the core data analysis chapter. This highlights the overlapping nature of themes. Indeed, Patton (2002) warned that themes even within an interview guide will not appear in the same place in the interview (p. 440), as themes were interconnected and made a complex overall picture of the queer international students' experience studying abroad. In fact, I did find pieces of themes emerging in various conversation topics or in response to different questions or probes throughout the interview process that overlapped or connected with other themes that I had identified. I looked for these particular sensitizing concepts alongside looking for any unexpected themes that the

participants talked about themselves. Pinpointing unpredictable themes brought up by the students themselves was especially important considering the nature of my study that tried to be respectful of various ways in which gender and sexual identity could be experienced and perceived cross culturally.

This method of finding themes brought up by the queer international students themselves meant that this particular manner of data analysis was inductive, which Patton (2002) claims "involves *discovering* patterns, themes, and categories in one's data. Findings emerge out of the data, in contrast to *deductive analysis* where the data are analyzed according to an existing framework" (p. 453). As themes emerged it became clear that they were important to analyze and were sought for specifically when subsequent transcripts were coded. Therefore, the method of analysis evolved into a more deductive approach as I utilized grounded theory which "emphasizes becoming immersed in the data – being *grounded* – so that embedded meanings and relationships can emerge" (Patton, 2002, p. 454).

During the transcription phase, I began noting themes brought up by the participants and any themes related to the sensitizing concept into a virtual sticky note through the inductive analytical approach. I compiled anything that the international queer students emphasized in these interviews or any points that I found interesting. As I worked through completing these transcriptions, I also looked out for themes that I had identified in previously transcribed interviews. When I had completed transcribing all of the interviews, I compiled these discovered themes, whether they be unexpected or predicted themes from the interview guide, into a legend that differentiated themes with different highlighting and sticky note colours. I then began the process of coding by reading transcripts and highlighting any themes from the legend that I came across in a particular transcript. This is when analysis became more deductive. After completing

coding of each individual transcript, I made a summative word file of the themes I encountered within that particular transcript. When all of the transcripts had been coded, I selected the most interesting, relevant, and common themes that had appeared in the interview transcripts. I then reread all of the transcripts once more in order to make sure that any themes that I intended to analyze had been searched for in all of the transcripts. I amended the summative files throughout this process if I discovered more instances of these themes. Lastly, I used these summative files to discern which students had discussed which themes during my final write-up of the data analysis chapter.

3.5 Limitations

There were some practical, ethical, and theoretical limitations to my study that are important to mention. Practically and theoretically, asking international students to talk about their experiences as queer international students presupposed that these experiences would be different than domestic queer students based on their cultural perception of sexuality. While there is significant literature to confirm this presupposition (Herdt, 1993; Wilchins, 2004), it was a very meticulous and fine lined process to try and identify exactly how much culture played a role in defining their experience and perceptions of homosexuality. Indeed, the extent of this limitation was highlighted by the two international queer students from Brazil who had different opinions and perceptions of sexuality than each other from living in different cities, even though they both came from the same country. In order to counteract this, I have attempted to focus on major political and cultural frameworks in the macro environment in combination with the participants' own perceptions of their environments in their micro environment to make sure that each participant’s experiences are looked at individually. In the end, these experiences with sexuality will naturally be different for all students according to subjectivitist ontological and

epistemological positions, but I have tried my best to focus on parts of their sexuality that relate in some way to their status as culturally diverse. I believe this to be acceptable as the intention of this study is not to speak in general terms about what the experiences of quintessential queer international students may be. Instead, it is intended to look deeper into how changes in broader political and cultural discourses in different educational contexts have affected the experiences and sexual identities of a small group of international queer students.

In terms of ethics, I recognize that it may have been difficult for some students to discuss their sexual orientations with a stranger. I had to be continually aware of the power differential involved in asking participants to be very forthright with personal details of their lives and tried to be as friendly and open as possible to make the students feel more comfortable. Also, as always with the nature of qualitative studies, it is entirely possible that the students may have not been entirely upfront or truthful during our interviews. While there was no reason to suspect dishonesty as all of our interviews appeared to be easygoing and casual conversations that would not pressure a participant to lie, the sensitive nature of the questions could be seen as exacerbating a desire on the part of the students to avoid certain questions and therefore be less truthful. I believe this was counteracted by clearly stating that it was not necessary for the participants to answer questions if they were not comfortable, and that they could look over the interview transcripts to amend any information before it would be analyzed in the final paper. Although few, some students did decline to answer certain questions during the interviews. This suggests that the students felt comfortable declining to answer questions and the pressure to answer, at least, would not have contributed to any possible compulsion to be untruthful.

The sensitive nature of the research on the topic of sexual minority identities also made confidentiality and anonymity an integral issue in my research that had to be carefully planned

out. I had to be cognizant of issues of how "out" and socially vocal respondents may have wanted to be about their sexual orientation, as well as different cultural understandings that may have made talking about issues of sex an uncomfortable process (Patton, 2002, p. 393). While I do believe that the students that responded were willing to address their sexuality as it was clearly the focus of my inquiry, I did want to make sure that the sharing process was as comfortable for them as possible. In this way I attempted to provide confidentiality to those that I interviewed by changing their names and names of those they discussed. Although it would have aided confidentiality, I believed that changing the nationality or self-identified gender of my respondents would too strongly change the topic of my research and had be included in the report. I also provided the participants with transcripts of our interview conversations to ensure that they were comfortable with all information being released, and offered to change or remove any offending information before moving to the data analysis phase. Although I could not offer anonymity to everyone due to the in person nature of the qualitative interviews that I wished to pursue, I could offer confidentiality and anonymity in the final report.

3.6 Conclusion

I believe that the qualitative interviews, along with an interpretivist epistemology, a culturally relative understanding of the performance of sexuality, and a poststructuralist stance on identity that were chosen for this study were the best options for attempting to give voice to the participants' different experiences and perceptions of queer identity. In fact, the success of the recruitment process through flyers and word of mouth as well as the data rich interviews can be seen as an indication of the extent to which some queer international students have wished to have their voices heard. These interviews, as they were focused on sensitive issues of sexuality, were of course confidential and approached with an open ended interview guide in order to keep

the participants relaxed and comfortable. The interview guide was effective in also making sure that certain sensitizing concepts were addressed in interviews, along with discovered themes that were brought up by the international queer student participants themselves. I was also conscious of the study's limitations and was careful about including analysis of both the participants' macro and micro interactions with their environments on a national and local scale. I also attempted to keep the interviewees relaxed in order to facilitate honest and comfortable communication. Ultimately, I believe that what the international queer students felt was important was revealed through approaching the data analysis inductively, making it a success as it revealed interesting perspectives and stories on the part of the participants that is further explored in the data analysis chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Participant Profiles

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the backgrounds and personal characteristics of the participants interviewed for this study. Included in their profiles is: year and degree; country of origin; sexual identification and comfort with that identification; and reasons for choosing to study at Central University and in Canada. To provide context for understanding how the students' cultural surroundings have changed by moving to Canada for postsecondary education, an important element of the next chapter, each profile also gives relevant background information on legal frameworks, cultural attitudes, and personal perceptions of the environment for sexual minorities in both the students' home country and Central University in Canada. An overview of the Canadian legal context, as well as official supports offered for queer students at Central University, is also included. Finally, there is a chart at the end of this chapter that summarizes these information points for each participant.

4.2 Central University

The queer international students all attended Central University, a large university in Ontario, Canada. Central University offers many official supports for both international and queer students, the most expansive of which is Pride Central. Pride Central is a centre organized by Central's University Students' Council that provides a space on campus for drop-in counselling for queer students. They also organize informative discussion panels, social nights, and a weeklong Pride Week every year on campus. The University Students' Council also runs Pride Central's sister program, Ally Central. This organization aims to teach the campus community how to be 'allies', or people who are informed, sensitive to, and accepting of sexual

minorities. This is attempted through seminars offered to various student groups on campus that include student residence staff and school volunteers. Ally and Pride Central are also responsible for the plentiful queer positive stickers that are posted on the corners of most doors on the campus's facilities to indicate accepting and positive places for queer students. Other support systems that the international students mentioned in their interviews included Pride Fest, a one day festival advocating and celebrating sexual minority identities during undergraduate Orientation week, as well as the Pride Library, a section of the campus's main library dedicated to queer literature which also occasionally holds social or informative events.

In addition, there is a dedicated psychological support service on campus that offers individual counselling for those needing to discuss issues related to their sexuality. While not directly affiliated with queer identities, there is also an international student office on campus that organizes events, orientations, and provides counselling and support for international students on campus. Although they have no direct queer programming, they do have a rainbow flag on display in their offices that is meant to indicate a queer positive space for international queer students.

As Central University is situated within the greater cultural and political context of Canadian society, it is important to discuss the various laws and policies surrounding queer issues in Canada. In terms of LGBTQ acceptance, Canada's laws are fairly progressive. In Canada, same-sex marriage has been legal since 2005, discrimination against queer identities in employment has been illegal since 1998, and adoption is also legal for queer individuals (ILGA, n.d.a). For Ontario's trans population, Ontario's provincial health plan funds sex reassignment surgeries (Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2008). In terms of cultural acceptance, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (2013) has reported that public

harassment of queer people in urban centres has been declining. However, they also reported that there is still cultural discrimination that exists in Canada, embodied in such things as an income gap between heterosexual and homosexual people and in an increase in hate crimes against queer individuals. However, the prevalence of legal frameworks to protect and support queer people suggests it is a progressive environment for queer students and that they would find recourse against any potential discrimination.

4.3 Ian

Ian is a Canadian national who grew up in The British Virgin Islands (BVI), moving there with his family at the age of seven. Although his Canadian nationality prohibited him from being officially labelled an international student at Central University, he spent the majority of his life and childhood in BVI, and his interest in participating in this study reflects his own perception of himself as an international student. As such, he is sufficiently internationalized to be considered an international student for the purposes of this study. In BVI, he attended an international high school with the International Baccalaureate curriculum, in which most other students in his class were not local to the island. Ian had always intended to return to Canada for university because of the economic advantage of paying low Canadian student fees as a Canadian national. He chose to attend Central University from an advertising slogan that appealed to him as well as its proximity to family that lived in the area. In terms of his sexuality, Ian claimed that he used to identify as gay but has since identified himself as questioning, while still acknowledging the influence of homosexuality. He was very open and upfront about his sexuality on Central campus without fear of harassment, and believes his homosexuality to be obvious. From his time spent studying at Central University, he perceived the campus to be

warm and welcoming to queer students. He described the differences he felt studying in Canada as opposed to BVI:

> People know more about [homosexuality in Canada] and they're more accepting of it. And I find in the Caribbean there's a very clear distinction, like 'oh, you're straight' and 'you're gay'. But here it's just sort of like everyone… no one really cares, basically? And I'd rather that no one really cares about homosexuality than people care negatively. And then there's a lot of people here that are very accepting of it, so that's the main difference.

Ian was content with the level of acceptance he felt on Central University and in Canada in general. On Central University campus in particular he cited the university's Pride Festival in making the campus more informed and accepting of LGBTQ people:

> The [Pride Fest] rally thing in O-Week where they have the speakers talking about [Pride Fest] and acceptance of diversity and things like that. I think that really helps or shows people who aren't necessarily very familiar with homosexuality and LGBT matters... just sort of helps them open up to it and accept it.

Ian perceived the climate at Central University to be positive and accepting because he believed that people on campus did not care about his sexuality. He also felt that the university's queer friendly programming increased this knowledge and acceptance of others on campus.

In Ian's previous residential country of BVI, there is an intertwined system of governance between local rule and British rule, and therefore legal rights for those who identify as a sexual minority are made somewhat complicated. BVI has its own local government, but it is required to adhere to the European Convention on Human Rights due to its governing connection to England (*Wikipedia* "LGBT Rights", 2014). Local rule in BVI does not acknowledge

homosexuality, but it is illegal there to discriminate against someone based on their sexual orientation because of the blanket rule of the European Charter. Homosexuality between women has never been illegal in the BVI, but homosexuality between men was only recently legalized in 2001 by order of the British Government (Mintz, 2013). Although same sex marriage is legal in England, same sex marriage is not recognized in BVI and England has stated that they will not force BVI to make such marriages legal. This is perhaps to do with the strong religious culture on the island and the anti-gay campaigning taken on by governmental leaders and condemnation from religious leaders on the issue (*Wikipedia* "LGBT Rights", 2014).

Ian's relationship with the climate for LGBTQ people on the island is a complicated one. He was both a white and gay minority on the island, but his place in a mostly expatriate enrolled international school kept him somewhat sheltered from the local homophobia. Ian was open about his sexuality in BVI and claimed that his experience as gay there was "neutral" and not negative, despite claiming that the island was a homophobic environment. However, he did remember a few uncommon occasions in which he experienced direct or indirect discrimination. These included an AIDS awareness rally where riotous anti-gay shouts emanated from the mostly local crowd, as well as derogatory whispers of the BVI slur "anti-man" from locals in the streets that he shrugged off. Ian explains that in BVI the most common derogatory slang term for gay men was 'anti-man,' which implied that a man was not a 'real' or 'true' man because of his non-heterosexuality. He claimed that the idea of homosexuality on the island was not addressed as locals turned their back on the issue, and that he utilized the internet for most information to help him understand his sexuality. There were no sexual minority supports or organizations that he was aware of in his school or on the island, but he discovered his own support network through building relationships with teachers and queer friends. He also noted a small number of

queer activists on the island, but in general claimed that “it’s sort of like the island pushes gay people away”.

4.4 Mia

Mia is a 27 year old second year PhD candidate from a large city in Mexico. She completed all of her education up until the end of her Master’s degree in Mexico, and later moved to Canada to pursue her PhD. Mia's decision to complete her PhD in Canada rested on hopes of personal growth, the practice of English, and the added recognition of an international degree. Her decision to study at Central University in particular was influenced by funding opportunities. She identifies as lesbian for ease of communication, but considers her sexuality more nuanced and prefers the term pansexual, as she claimed she is attracted to people rather than gender and is occasionally attracted to men. She has informed some friends about her sexuality in Canada and feels comfortable being out on the general campus, which she believes is accepting. However, she claimed that she is not comfortable with her departmental peers or professors knowing her sexuality as she claimed that there are a higher percentage of international students in her department that she perceived to be more conservative and less accepting than the wider campus. She also took into consideration that these people may be her future work colleagues and did not wish to be vulnerable to them. She explained her opinion of Central University's climate for queer people in this way:

> I would say that it’s okay. It’s not super good. But I think it’s okay. I know a couple of people that are studying something different. Like they’re not in my program and they’re different. They’re more open and more welcoming. Yeah, I think it’s fine.

Mia was content with but not overly satisfied with the level of acceptance she perceived specifically in her program, but was happier with the wider campus community. In addition, she

also believed that there were not enough university supports on campus, though at the time of the interview she was unaware of any of Central's existing supports besides Pride Central's discussion panels. Fundamentally, however, she still perceived of Canada in general to be more accepting than Mexico based on its laws and equal rights:

> I think Canada is a better environment for gay people. I think here you can get married and you can get your rights as partners. ... I think there's homophobia in both countries but I think here legally it's a better place to live.

Ultimately, Mia believed Canada to be more accepting of queer people than Mexico because of Canada's laws, and perceived of Central University's climate to be "okay" for queer students.

In Mia's home country of Mexico, homosexuality is legal, with some states legalizing same sex marriage and all states federally required to recognize same sex civil unions (ILGA, n.d.b.). It is also illegal to discriminate against LGBTQ people in employment (ILGA, n.d.b). However, there is reported to be rampant homophobia in Mexico culturally, with queer people reporting difficulties with harassment in their communities and particularly in HIV clinics (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2002). According to a shadow report by The International Human Rights Clinic, Human Rights Program of Harvard Law School, Global Rights, and the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission [IGLHRC] (2010):

> Despite these [legal] advances, however, LGBT persons continue to face discrimination and human rights violations based on their gender identity and sexual orientation. The overall culture in Mexico remains highly repressive in its attitudes towards LGBTI persons. The persistence of discriminatory sentiment towards the LGBTI community is illustrated by a recent poll of the Mexican population, which showed that 48.4% would never live with an LGB person and that 11.6% would never hire one. ("Executive

Summary" section)

This report also claims violence is still a pressing issue for Mexico's LGBTQ population, with one study finding that between 1995 and 2007, there were 464 homophobic and transphobic crimes committed, with another study finding that 76.4% of Mexican LGBT persons experienced physical violence because of their sexual or gender identity (The International Human Rights Clinic et al., 2010).

Growing up in Mexico, Mia hid her sexuality from her family until they accidentally discovered her same sex attraction when she was twenty-two. After a short period of conflict, her parents accepted her sexuality, yet she still perceived some discomfort on their part and is not out to her extended family. She did, however, claim she felt acceptance from her group of Mexican friends. She cited their acceptance as a large part of the reason why she felt comfortable and happy in Mexico as a lesbian, a place that she claimed in general was not very accepting of homosexuality. She could recall instances of mild homophobia and discrimination in Mexico, but had similar tales in her experiences off campus in Canada. She did, however, note concern over marriage laws in Mexico and a more conservative stress on traditional femininity. She chose not to tell her sexuality to her professors in Mexico or Canada, preferring to keep the relationship professional and work focused, but claimed that her Mexican peers were more relaxed and she was less concerned about telling them about her sexuality than her departmental Canadian ones. There were no queer supports in place in her Mexican university, but believed there to be a higher amount of gay people and she greatly appreciated the support of her group of queer friends.

4.5 Zachary

Zachary, a Guyanese national, was a recent graduate from a Master's program at Central

University. His education up until his Master's degree all took place in Guyana. His sexuality affected his decision to study abroad because he claimed that as he grew older he was more keen to be open with his sexuality and find a relationship. He believed that it would be easier to do those things in Canada. However, he also cited his family roots in Canada, the ease of immigration after graduation, and the added recognition of an international degree as reasons for moving to Canada to study. Zachary succinctly labelled himself as a gay man, but was not open about his sexuality at Central. He told a few trusted friends but otherwise claimed that he would be uncomfortable with other people on campus knowing about his sexuality. Regardless of his decision to remain quiet about his sexual identity, he did perceive Central University campus to be welcoming and accepting of LGBTQ people. He founded this belief upon the mutual respect between straight and queer students and professors that he saw:

> The fact that there is LGBT faculty and there is LGBT students. I mean, that alone for me is comforting, you know. I don't need to know anything else. I don't need to know that, you know, there is services for LGBT people. I don't need to be explicitly told anything. The fact that [LGBTQ people] are there and they're you know, functioning and interacting and respectful of each other and students are respectful of them and professors are respectful of students. That's, you know what I mean, that says it all.

The respect and interaction between straight and gay people on campus that he saw indicated to him that Central University was accepting of LGBTQ people. He also claimed to take comfort from queer themed events on campus, even though he would not take part in them personally:

> During this Pride Week... they would show movies and they would have different events and during that week I would feel welcome. I would pass the notice boards and just stop and read a little bit about what movies they would be showing and the events and so it

was heart-warming... You know. So I guess during that period I did feel, you know, 'this is nice'. ... I just liked to read about them, you know, although I wasn't a part of it. It just made, you know mean, that it was accepted. Yeah I did feel pretty welcome.

The prevalence of university events and respect that he saw between queer students and faculty on campus made Zachary feel welcomed and comfortable as an queer student during his time studying at Central university.

In comparison, however, homosexuality is illegal exclusively between males in Zachary's home country of Guyana and is punishable with up to two years of imprisonment. However, the act of buggery, anal intercourse, between any two sexed adults is a federal offense punishable with life imprisonment (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013). There are also official laws against cross dressing in public, affecting trans and gender non-conforming queer populations as well (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006). A research directorate for The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2006) compiled a report on the situation for LGBTQ people in Guyana with contributions from various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and activist groups who claimed "that homophobia is widespread in Guyana" ("General Situation" section). It also recorded that "a representative of the Guyana Human Rights Association (GHRA) sent correspondence stating that it was 'both rare and dangerous for gay/lesbian individuals to publicize their sexual status'", as well as "Amnesty International USA note[ing]that it is difficult for members of the LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] community to reveal their sexuality, even to friends and family, and that discrimination against homosexuals is common practice" (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006, "General Situation" section).

The report also claims that homophobia in the country is compounded by the rejection of queer people by strong religious groups on the island who were responsible for thwarting a non-

discrimination amendment being processed by Guyanese parliament (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006). Of course, as homosexuality is illegal, same sex marriage is also not legal. In fact, there is even cultural violence and hate towards the issue. It is reported that one unofficial marriage that took place in Georgetown resulted in one of the wedded men being assassinated. Indeed, one activist organization in Guyana, SASOD, noted receiving many complaints against hate crimes and police brutality against LGBTQ people. Furthermore, there were no statistics on homophobic crimes or punishments found by the research group designated by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, believing that these crimes go underreported because of fear on the island (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006). While there are a few groups such as SASOD that act as activists on the island, they have claimed they do their work through an "atmosphere of apprehension", with a representative from the Guyana Human Rights Association claiming “the stigma attached to gay life-styles requires extra-ordinary care for any social activism on the issue” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006, "Non-governmental Organizations" section). However, the existence of these NGO groups is one positive element of Guyanese society.

Zachary held back from labelling Guyana a homophobic country and referred to it instead as conservative. He claimed that he was nowhere close to being open about his sexuality in Guyana, and informed me of the illegality of homosexual acts between men in the country. He referred to his upbringing in Guyana as “traumatic" and spoke about the difficulty of being unable to pursue romantic relationships because of a need to hide his sexuality. Indeed, Zachary claimed that his ultimate goal in Guyana was to pass as straight and intended to never reveal himself to his Guyanese friends. He felt, however, that he had a good life in Guyana and never

felt threatened because his sexuality was so well hidden. Despite this, he claimed that he would probably fear for his safety if he were unsuccessful at hiding his sexuality.

This passing as straight spread further into Zachary's academic world as he was unable to address homosexual themes in his writing. Indeed, he recites a memory of one foreign professor attempting to teach a book with a homosexual character, ultimately causing a revolt by Guyanese students claiming that it was against their religious beliefs. Zachary was not a part of any LGBTQ organizations, although he knew of one activist group in Guyana, and was out to a teacher and friend. He believed that people would be confused if he were to come out to his homophobic friends in Guyana, as their experience and understanding of homosexuality disallowed them the ability to see homosexuality and goodness as being possible traits in the same person. After studying in Canada, he revealed his gay identity to his family. He believed that they already knew he was gay and were subtly pushing him to be open with his sexuality. His family took the news well and Zachary is grateful for their acceptance and support, but still found the experience one of vulnerability.

4.6 Diya

Diya is a self-defined ethnic and racial Arab born in The Middle East who moved to Canada at the age of one and became a Canadian. She then moved with her family to Qatar as a small child and completed her education there until she returned to Canada for a Canadian university education. Like Ian, Diya is not considered an official international student at Central University because of her Canadian nationality. Yet she perceived herself to be an international student as the majority of her life was spent outside of Canada. Her experiences therefore reflect those of official international students and as such, she has been included in this study. At the time of the interview she was in the second year of her undergraduate degree.

Diya chose Canada for a post-secondary education because her Canadian nationality allowed her to pay lower tuition fees than if she were an official international student. The decision to attend Central University in particular was made by her family who wanted her to live with family that already resided in the city where Central University is located. She was open to remaining in Canada after graduation but believed it would easier to find a job in the Middle East, so she claimed that she may return there. In the past, Diya labelled herself as a lesbian but claimed that she has since come to feel more affinity with the terms demi-sexual[2] or pansexual[3], however she often referred to herself as bisexual throughout our conversation. She was open about her sexuality at Central, and although she didn't advertise it or believe it to be an integral part of her self-definition, she would not hesitate to tell another student or professor that she is queer. However, she felt some concern about revealing her sexuality to other strongly religious people in fear of them being more homophobic, and to other Muslims in particular as they may have had a connection to her family, potentially revealing her sexuality to her parents. When asked if she felt supported as a queer international student at Central University, Diya replied "absolutely" and further expounded "I definitely know... in Central, no matter what I identify as, what my race is, what my religion is, I'd be accepted no matter what and I think that's amazing". In particular, she remembered the moment of Central's Pride Festival during orientation making her feel the most accepted:

> It was definitely [Pride Fest]. I mean I knew one of my sophs was gay. And someone was on stage talking about it. I think it was that guy who came from the military and he was discharged but he still served... He pointed at him and he's like 'stand up if you're gay

[2] A demi-sexual feels sexual attraction to a person only after forming emotional bonds with that person (AVENwiki "Demisexual", n.d.).
[3] A pansexual is a person who "can be attracted to females, males, and individuals of other genders" (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 3).

> and proud' and had the rainbow flag in his hand and just spinning it and he was lively and I was just like 'that's beautiful. I love that' and I kind of just cheered him on. Like this was the most moment that I was excited and like really supported with it.

Diya felt that the Central University campus was accepting of her sexual minority status and appreciated supportive moments such as Pride Festival that made her feel particularly accepted.

Homosexuality in her previous country of Qatar, on the other hand, is illegal, with sodomy between two any sexed consenting adults being punishable with up to five years in prison and sexual relations between same sexed partners punishable with up to seven years (Itaborahy, 2012). While there have been recorded incidents of this illegality being pursued by law enforcement against foreigners living in Qatar, being punished with arrests and lashings, the extent to which Qatari citizens may be punished by this law is unclear (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2001). According to an ILGA representative as quoted in *Qatar: Information on Homosexuals*, "based on contact with individuals in 'similarly oppressive states in the Gulf,' it would be 'most unlikely' that a Qatari national would seek publicity upon such prosecution because of concerns for the safety of the individual, his/her family, and his/her 'future existence' in Qatar" (United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2001, p. 1). The report also indicated that there are no visible supports for LGBTQ people in Qatar.

Diya referred to her home of Qatar as homophobic and claimed that she had to hide her sexuality there. She told me that in Qatar, homosexuality was against the law at the penalty of imprisonment or death, although she had not heard of this actually happening. According to her, most queer people she knew were more afraid of punishment from their parents than the law and spoke of a general fear of parents disowning their gay children or literally killing them. Indeed,

Diya believed that if her sexuality were to be revealed to her family it would be a disaster. This belief was confirmed by strong homophobic comments from her parents as well as instances of abuse during a time in which she was suspected of being homosexual. Diya felt unsafe in Qatar if people were to find out about her sexuality, finding it difficult to be herself and always having to be careful who she told that she was queer, especially with older generations. She claimed that homophobia is most rampant amongst the older generation who would find it abominable or a phase. Alternatively, she believed that her peers were more likely to see homosexuality as acceptable or a phase.

Although she acted straight and was not out to her schoolmates in Qatar, Diya had a strong group of friends who were very accepting of her sexuality. This included a romantic interest who had helped her to come to terms with her own initially prejudiced perception of homosexuality. There were no official LGBTQ groups that Diya could be a part of in Qatar, but she confided in one of her supportive and friendly British teachers and also claimed that there was a large queer underground that gave her hope in Qatar. However, she was unsatisfied with her view of these people's management of homosexuality which included marrying into heterosexual relationships and maintaining homosexual relationships outside of their marriage. Future relationships were of a great concern to her as she felt cultural pressure as an Arab to marry.

4.7 Samuel

Samuel moved from Jamaica to begin his PhD at Central University, in his second year at the time of the interview. He cited feelings of wanting to escape Jamaica's oppressive climate and be more open with his sexuality as reasons for moving to Canada. He hoped to use education as a good transition for this move, but claimed that the decision to come to Central in particular

over another university was made purely for its funding opportunity. Samuel identified as a gay man and although he claimed that he was becoming more comfortable with his sexuality, he chose not to be open about it publically. He believed that being out would not be a problem and was not concerned about any repercussions, but he considered his sexuality a personal issue and had only told a few close friends. He did, however, believe that campus was warm and welcoming to LGBTQ students based upon the success of other open LGBTQ students in maintaining respect from other students. He claimed that:

> There are a couple persons who are in [my] class, about two or three who are openly gay and classmates are good to them. They are, it's as if there is no difference so it contrasts to what exists in Jamaica, you know... I think for the most part, the entire university community is embracing and progressive in their thinking about LGBT people.

Seeing the respect and good treatment openly LGBTQ people received on campus made Samuel feel that Central University was an accepting place. He also perceived of the campus as warm and welcoming to LGBTQ students because of its clear anti-discrimination policies:

> It's explicit that the university's progressive in its thinking about LGBT people and there is sensitivity in that everyone is included. There are groups and structures in place to deal with any sort of discrimination or injustice that might be meted out to you because of your sexuality or anything like that. So there are avenues to deal with it. There are courses that you can do if you want to be more knowledgeable, you know. Professors are open and so it makes you feel as if you know, it's fine to be gay. It's fine to be here at Central.

The structures that were in place to support queer students and condemn discrimination as well as the good treatment and respect that he saw other LGBTQ people receive indicated to him that

Central University was a warm and welcoming environment for sexual minorities.

This contrasts, however, with the legal frameworks and cultural outlook in Samuel's home country of Jamaica, with many reports indicating that Jamaica is an intensely homophobic country. According to a research paper entitled *Jamaica: Treatment of Homosexuals in Jamaica* compiled by Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre (2010), buggery, or anal intercourse, commonly associated with male homosexual sexual relations, is illegal and subject to imprisonment and hard labour for up to ten years. This obscure law ostensibly means that heterosexual buggery is also illegal, female to female relationships and homosexual relations between two men absent of anal intercourse is technically legal. However, vagueness surrounds the wording of this law and its interpretations, and Samuel claims that he has never heard of anyone being actually charged with these crimes and that it is a law left on the books from Jamaica's British colonial history. However, activists claim that the often unapplied law is instead used in order to marginalize queer people in Jamaica and allows the proliferation of blackmail on the island (Mintz, 2013).

This Jamaican law that officially condones the condemnation of queer people appears to be pervasive and affects the perception and treatment of queer people from Jamaica's citizens in general. This can be seen in the high crime rate and mob violence inflicted upon queer people, particularly gay men. Such examples include fire bombings of a believed gay couple's house which has resulted in burns over 60% of one man's body, and home break ins and murders of suspected homosexual men. While crimes like these are half-heartedly pursued by police, many crimes go unreported for fear of retaliation or lack of efficiency, and queer inmates in prisons are often subject to harassment and are usually removed from general population (Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre, 2010). Indeed, such violence is even openly condoned in Jamaica's

culture, with popular reggae music commonly promoting gay bashing and the hatred of LGBTQ people. According to The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2007):

> [T]he homophobia which suffuses the music, religion, society and government has combined into a peculiar nationalism... Gay- bashing has become a kind of patriotism, an act in defence of the nation, and an integral part of the Jamaican identity. (p.2)

Homophobia is truly a problem in Jamaica that stems from the upper levels of government and suffuses down into its citizens and culture. As a result, it is potentially physically and mentally damaging to its queer citizens.

Samuel's own description of his time in Jamaica was similar to the descriptions of official research listed above. He described Jamaica as a heavily religious and very homophobic country where it is frowned upon to be gay or openly gay. In Jamaica he was out only to his partner, but claimed that because of his higher social class he was able to live domestically with his partner without much trouble. Although he lived a double life where he conformed and acted straight, he assumed that his neighbours and acquaintances may have suspected his sexuality. He described worries over his profession as an educator and that perceptions of the connection between pedophilia and homosexuality had been a great cause of concern for him in Jamaica. He also discussed how physical violence is often a concern for queer people in Jamaica in general, especially from those of a lower class. One issue he had in particular was in attending straight events, such as those at dance halls where openly homophobic and violent themed music is played. Although he himself was not part of any queer organizations, he did note the existence of one that is currently working to challenge homophobia in laws in the country.

4.8 Jose

Jose was a Brazilian national spending his fifth year on his undergraduate degree in

Canada to learn more about his major and improve his English skills. He believed Canada to be a good destination for an international study because of his belief that Canada's spoken English is slower and less accented than other countries and therefore easier to learn, as well as the country's low living costs in relation to other English speaking countries. He also noted Canada's proximity to the United States and the opportunities for exploring Canada's natural geography as a benefit to him. He identified as a gay man and claimed that he has had moderate difficulty with this identification in Brazil. He did not cite sexuality as a reason for his international sojourn, nor was he concerned what his sexuality would mean for him in Canada before departing Brazil. He claimed that his sexuality was not a problem during travel as he did not believe himself to be visibly gay. At Central University in particular, Jose perceived the campus to be accepting based upon mutual respect he saw shared between students regardless of differences:

> People here, they are very educated and they're respectful and they respect everyone. I can see this on the street in my university. I can talk about a lot of things with my professors, my international coordinator, and nobody judges me about who I am... People don't care if your hair is black, yellow, if you just wake up and came to university, pfft, it's up to you. No problem.

Jose's belief that there was no judgment on the Central University campus made him feel more comfortable as a queer student. He also believed that the university itself was supportive of him and claimed "Central offers a lot of support and a lot of services. We have a lot of information to start our studies here. And I really don't know what could be more important". To him, Central University was a welcoming, non-judgmental and supportive environment in which he did not feel discriminated against in terms of his sexual minority status.

In general, the LGBTQ climate in Jose's home country of Brazil appears to be fairly accepting based upon legal frameworks, cultural attitudes, and safety of queer people. Homosexuality has been legal in Brazil since 1831 and the country's constitution prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2008). Brazil has recognized same sex marriage since 2011 and in 2013 passed further legislation which disallowed judicial notaries to refuse officiating a same sex marriage (Brocchetto, 2013), effectively giving same sex attracted citizens the same social and financial rights as heterosexual citizens in terms of relationships (BBC, 2011). There are also numerous activist and NGO LGBTQ groups as well as government organized support systems in place for queer people. These supports help with those who may be facing discrimination or mental and physical health issues. Brazil's national health plan also covers gender transition surgeries (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2008). In terms of cultural acceptance, Brazil seems quite accepting, and has a high population of queer people and hosts the world's largest pride parade with almost 2.5 million people in attendance (The Association of GLBT Pride Parade in Sao Paulo, n.d.). However, regardless of an accepting cultural discourse and legal protections put in place there are still high incidents of violence and discrimination reported, and homophobia is still considered to be a prevalent issue within Brazil (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2008). Of course these situations will be contextual, temporal and spatial specific phenomena and individuals living in Brazil may experience different levels of acceptance or homophobia than others.

In his interview, Jose spoke at length about his experience as a gay man in Brazil. He claimed that his sexuality was problematic for him because of worries about family acceptance and his future in the small Brazilian city he grew up in. According to Jose, in the past the climate

for LGBTQ people in Brazil was bad but it had been improving with time. Jose himself was not out to his family, but was out to a small number of friends who have not since changed their regard of him. While he chose to only tell people that he trusted, his ideology was that if people did not accept him then they were not worth being in his life. He believed that in time and with necessity his family will know, and was optimistic that they have grown more progressive over time and would hopefully accept him. Jose claimed that it is more likely in Brazil than Canada for a friend of his to modify their relationship with him if they discovered he was gay, a fear that he continued to carry in Canada. He claimed that he still felt fear about his sexual identity and told me that he was worried about people judging him based on his sexuality. This was exacerbated by what he describes as a homogeneous and judgmental culture in Brazil, with people judging others on things as mundane as clothes and hair styles, above and beyond sexual identity. He also said that there was a possibility of violence against gay people in the streets due to what he described as people with bad intentions against homosexuals. He claimed that his university in Brazil had no supports for queer people and very few international students, but he was able to confide in his Brazilian international coordinator and Brazilian professors about issues excluding his sexuality, and felt supported by them.

4.9 Paulo

At the time of the interview, Paulo was a second year PhD student at Central University. He was born in a large city in Brazil, and then moved to an even larger city to pursue his Master's before studying in Canada for his PhD. He claimed that his decision to move to Canada was founded upon a personal recommendation to come to Canada and pursue further education. His sexuality did not influence his decision to study in a foreign country, but he did acknowledge that he would not have gone through with an international sojourn if the country he were to visit

were homophobic, noting that he knew Canada was accepting and, therefore, would be an acceptable place to pursue his PhD. Paulo felt that his sexuality was not obvious in his self-presentation, but he was perfectly comfortable identifying himself as a gay man and did not care if his peers or professors at Central knew of his sexual orientation. He also believed that people in Canada were non-judgmental and compared the environments for queer people in all of the cities where he had lived:

> In my [Brazilian birth city] people were more secular, they were more close minded. Because fear. The fear of God. In [my second city] people are more open minded. They are more receptive with people. Because in [that city] there are people from everywhere, so they are a little bit more open to possibilities. Here [in Canada], like, totally nonsense, people just don't care at all.

While he did not feel he was judged or mention any discrimination he had experienced on campus, an incident with Pride Central in which the receptionist was rude to him made him feel that the campus was not warm or welcoming to him. While he was unhappy with the welcome he received on campus, he felt that he would be supported if he were to face discrimination in an official sense. He felt this because of a course on harassment he was required to take as part of his training as a research assistant, which alerted him to the fact that it was unlawful for him to be discriminated against during his time at Central University. Paulo seemed to be comfortable and knew that he would be supported and respected on campus, but did not feel that he was received warmly as a queer individual because his experience with the campus's official queer group was a negative one.

Paulo claimed that he was open with his sexuality identity to the same degree in Brazil as he was at Central University. Besides one instance of homophobia in his workplace in his

hometown, a city he claimed was very Catholic, Paulo did not believe his gay identity to have been a problem for him in Brazil. Regardless, in general, he believed Brazil to be homophobic and heteronormative due to its strong Catholic background, citing citizens having an overall perspective of condemnation for queer people with stereotypes that they are bad, necessarily transgendered, and promiscuous. Paulo himself believed in a prevalence of promiscuity among gay men in Brazil and worried that he would have difficulty finding a lifelong relationship in his hometown. He also spoke of instances of violence and murder against queer people in Brazil, though he never felt this fear himself.

Paulo could remember instances of being bullied as he grew up in Brazil, but claimed that this no longer happened when he became an adult. In his undergraduate and Master's degrees, he felt that his university was very welcoming to queer students. He spoke with pride about an unofficial student activist organization that fought for rights of queer students dealing with homophobia in the university or outside campus. However, he claimed that the university was a more accepting bubble than the off campus city climate. He also took part in an activist NGO that helped queer street workers with sexual safety and issues of discrimination, claiming that he took comfort in working with like-minded activist peers who were accepting. There were no official supports or stances that he was aware of on behalf of the university administration, believing that the dean would not care about LGBTQ issues, however this fact did not bother him. While he was content with the idea but uncertain, he assumed that his family was aware of his homosexuality as he was transparent about his lifestyle on social media.

4.10 Table 1: ***Summary of Participants***

	Queer Self-Identification	Country of Origin	Legality of Homo-sexuality in Home Country	Openness with Sexuality in Home Country	Openness with Sexuality in Host Country (Canada)
Ian	Used to identify as gay, now questioning, but definitely homosexual.	The British Virgin Isles	Legal	Open	Open
Mia	Lesbian, yet prefers term pansexual	Mexico	Legal	Open to a certain degree. Not open with professors.	Open to a certain degree. Not open with departmental peers or professors
Zachary	Gay	Guyana	Illegal	Not open.	Not open.
Diya	Used to identify as lesbian, now prefers pansexual or demi-sexual. Sometimes bisexual.	Qatar	Illegal	Not open.	Open to a certain degree. Not open with family or other Muslim or religious students.
Samuel	Gay	Jamaica	Illegal	Not open.	Not open.
Jose	Gay	Brazil	Legal	Not open.	Not open.
Paulo	Gay	Brazil	Legal	Open.	Open.

4.11 Conclusion

As indicated above, the international student participants have come from different countries with a wide spectrum of LGBTQ acceptance or condemnation, based upon their own experiences as well as reports on political and cultural attitudes in the nation. These range from places like Qatar, Jamaica, and Guyana where homosexuality is illegal and the international students felt repressed, to countries such as Mexico, Brazil, and BVI where homosexuality is accepted but instances of homophobia or discrimination were still experienced by the international queer students in their home countries. The background of Central University is

also included as well as contextual information regarding the wider political and cultural framework of Canada, which the international queer student participants all indicated as being more accepting than their home countries. The participant profiles that describe the various ways in which the queer international students have experienced their queer identities within Central University in comparison to within their home countries is a testimony to the ways in which variations in culture can affect queer sexual minority lives, and is important background context for the following data analysis chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Data Analysis

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the experiences of seven queer international students interviewed for this study, focusing on their sexual minority identities in light of the degree of homophobia and official prohibitions against homosexuality in their residential countries. To varying degrees, the students all reported that Canada was more accepting of sexual minority identities than their home countries, based upon their personal experiences and understandings of legal and cultural support for queer people. For some students, such as those from Brazil, The British Virgin Isles, and Mexico, where queer individuals have a degree of official support and recourse to anti-discrimination laws on the basis of sexuality and gender expression (see Profiles), they still considered that there was greater acceptance of sexual and gender minorities in their host country. For others the change in perceived acceptance was drastic, such as in the case for students from Qatar, Jamaica, and Guyana where homosexuality is illegal and culturally condemned (see Profiles). After moving to Canada for post-secondary education, all of the participants identified changes or differences in their identity expression as sexual minority subjects to some degree. Using queer theory, this chapter analyzes the students' negotiations of their identities as they entered a different cultural and political environment in their host country to undertake their international studies.

The students all revealed to some degree a change in their identities as part of their experiences studying in Canada. Such a change is common for international students in general because their identities and perspectives are likely to be challenged as they engage in reflexivity with their new cultural environment, evaluating themselves and their home culture within the

context of the new (Montgomery, 2010). International students also commonly experience a period of adjustment where they change their identities to fit into their new cultural home. Luzio-lockett (1998) refers to this process as 'the squeezing effect,' where international students 'squeeze' themselves "into the frames of reference of the host culture, entailing an apparent tendency to attempt to squeeze one's identity within pre-established conventions" (p. 1). Indeed, Kettle (2011) undertook a study of international students in Australia and discovered that some students reported coming "to think in a slightly Australian way" (p. 10). Weber (2011) argues that foreign students tend to experience gradual identity changes while they study abroad as "international students dwell at the borderline of cultural difference, negotiating and redefining their historical or traditional past with their present experiences" (p. 23). For the queer international students in this study, evidence of changes of identity are indicated in the interviews where they discussed their evolving perspectives and understandings of themselves and their lives as sexual minority subjects in the host country.

This chapter breaks down the changes that the international students discuss into themes based on the types of changes identified. The most significant changes in international students' identities that I have chosen to focus on in this chapter include: (a) changes in self-identification and labelling as the students change what words and terms they use to define their sexualities; (b) changes in self-acceptance as their opinions on homosexuality and their own homosexual identities shift; (c) changes in self-understanding as they adjust the degree to which they are open with expressing their sexuality in a re-examination of their own identities; and (d) finally changes in their perceptions of their own potential professional and romantic futures as queer individuals.

5.2 Self-Identification and Labelling

One of the most overt ways in which the international queer students revealed their evolving perspectives on their identity was the labels and descriptions that they used to define their queer identity. Many of the students who were interviewed defined their queer identifications indeterminately or in wavering or conflicting language. This instability in labelling reflects the changing processes of identification that they are undergoing as they are reorienting their understandings of themselves within different cultural understandings of sexual identity and labels. The effect of this reorientation and unstable labelling in their self-identification is natural in connection with the reflexivity that international students experience when engaging with a new culture (Montgomery, 2010, p.100). The following section elaborates on the ways in which Ian, Mia, and Diya explain their sexual identity after moving abroad.

Ian, who hailed from The British Virgin Isles (BVI), changed the ways in which he wanted to define his sexuality after moving to Canada, illuminating both the fluid nature of his sexual identity and influence of broader social and cultural factors or norms. When asked how he self-identified in terms of his sexuality, Ian replied by presenting a previous concrete definition along with a present yet unstable term for self-definition:

> I used to identify as gay. But now I don't know. Now I'm questioning. So I've sort of come to terms with like, I don't really know exactly and I'm okay with that. But I'm definitely, there's homosexual.

Here, Ian has moved away from labelling himself as 'gay' and is instead defining himself as 'questioning', yet he still insists there is same-sex desire as 'there's homosexual'. Ian does not explicitly say when he chose to stop referring to himself as gay, but it is important to note that Ian chose to draw a line between "used to" and "now". He seems to be forfeiting the limits of gay self-identification in favour of embracing a more expansive queer identity or notion of

desire. For example, he does not deny same-sex desire – he still claims to be definitely 'homosexual'– but refuses the label of 'gay' and perhaps does not want to reduce his desire to an expression of exclusively same-sex attraction. Although he was asked only how he self-identifies, to which he could have merely noted his current label of 'questioning', Ian felt it was relevant to also include his past interpretation of his identity. This suggests that he is thinking about his sexuality in terms of a process where the term with which he used to define himself is also relevant to explaining his current sexual identity, making his identity an unstable and fluid concept. This is also reflected in the 'questioning' label he uses to explain his current sexuality. It could be inferred that Ian is questioning his sense of attraction as he is unsure or unable to predict who he will likely feel attracted to. It is also possible that Ian is questioning how defining himself as 'gay' has not been satisfactory in terms of how he experiences sexual desire or attraction. Either way, the label of 'questioning' along with his presentation of a progressive change in labels suggests that Ian has not found a concrete and stable definition of self-identity and appears to be in an active process of understanding his sexuality.

Many share this stance of finding identificatory labels lacking in representing individual identities. According to Jagose (1996), queer theorists "would argue that 'identity' is not a demonstrably empirical category but the product of processes of identification" (p. 9). This emphasis on process suggests that sexual identity will never be a stable and fixed point of destination and that, like for Ian, terms and understandings of sexual identity will continually evolve and change with his lived experiences. Indeed, Ian's decision to reject a concrete and stable term to adopt a fluid and less restricting term may have something to do with the change he experiences in the cultural acceptance of homosexuality between BVI and Canada. Griffin (1991) refers to Schur's descriptions of contemporary labelling theory, stating that:

> labeling is the prerogative of groups with the social and political power necessary to impose their definition of deviance on groups with less power. Social and political power is enacted through the institutions, laws, customs, and norms in a society. (p. 189)

Indeed, Butler (1991) makes a similar point when she argues that "identity categories tend to be instruments or regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of the very oppression" (as cited in Jagose, 1996, p. 91). Griffin (1991) furthers this point by referencing Kitzingner (1987) who claims that "the control of gender and sexual orientation are political issues rooted in the traditions and values of a patriarchal and heterosexist society" (p. 190). If labelling and sexual identity categories are indeed a method of control of sexual orientation by a heterosexist society attempting to preserve patriarchal power, there are implications of this in terms of self-labelling practices cross culturally. It is conceivable, then, that as Ian travels to what he perceives as a more accepting and, therefore, less heterosexist and sexuality controlling society, he may feel less pressure to conform to those strict labelling practices in terms of his sexual minority identity. In this way, the difference between environments of his home country and Canada, which he perceives as more accepting, may be significant in his self-labeling practice as he sheds a stable and strict 'gay' label and affiliates himself with a less rigid and more fluid 'questioning' self-identification, as suggested by his distinction between "used to" and "now". Ian's shifting use of terms to define his self-identification during his process of identification also rings true for other queer international students at Central University.

Mia also defines her sexuality with indefiniteness and multiple labels. She uses the common term of ‘lesbian’ to identify herself easily in society, but defines herself further with modifications to that term:

> I identify myself as gay, like lesbian, but … I started using the other word because it was easier for people to understand. But I'm actually attracted to guys too. But I didn't really date guys. So I just usually go out with woman but sometimes once in a while I go out with some random guy that I like. [laughs].

Mia defines her sexuality not with just the single term 'lesbian,' but also modifies her own understanding of 'lesbian' through adding extra descriptive sentences explaining her sexuality. Later, Mia also refers to herself as pansexual, which she explains as, "when you're attracted to the personality of the person. […] You're attracted to the person, not the gender" and which Kumashiro (2001) defines as a person who "can be attracted to females, males, and individuals of other genders" (p. 3). Like Ian who identifies as questioning outside of an established sexual identity category, Mia also transgresses available identity roles. She offers up to the term lesbian as it is easier understood in society, but also uses other language and makes her sexuality her own to more concretely explain exactly how she perceives her sexuality. However, her use of 'lesbian' when she desires ease of communication with a simple, commonly understood term instead of her longer and more nuanced description of her sexual identity is noteworthy in understanding the nature of self-identification that she is experiencing. Wilchins (2004), for example, points out that it is believed that in the West there is an emphasis on binary understandings, and therefore there is a strong pressure in Western society to understand sexuality in concrete binaries defined in terms of homosexual versus heterosexual, gay versus lesbian, etc.. Indeed, Kumashiro (2002), claims that the "tendency to think of sexuality as either/or often reflects a desire to stabilize and normalize a person's own sexual identity" (p. 4). This kind of thought makes it difficult for people like Mia whose sexuality does not fit perfectly and exactly into common sexual identity categories such as 'lesbian'. Indeed, this pressure to

dichotomize may be why Mia finds it easiest to define herself as ‘lesbian’ for easier communication and understanding, but is clear that her sexual desires cannot be defined solely in terms of such identificatory labels or categories - she is attracted to some men and finds gender irrelevant in most cases in terms of who she is attracted to.

In fact, this tendency to revert to the more simple and stable sexual category of 'lesbian' may also be tied to the politics of self-identification in a given situation. Butler (2001) writes about the process of identity recognition:

> the Other is recognized and confers recognition through a set of norms that governs recognizability. So whereas the Other may be singular, if not radically personal, the norms are to some extent impersonal and indifferent, and they introduce a disorientation of perspective for the subject in the midst of recognition as an encounter. For if I understand myself to be conferring recognition on you, for instance, then I take seriously that the recognition comes from me. But in the moment that I realize that the terms by which I confer recognition are not mine alone, that I did not singlehandedly make them, then I am, as it were, dispossessed by the language that I offer. In a sense, I submit to a norm of recognition when I offer recognition to you, so that I am both subjected to that norm and the agency of its use. (p. 22)

Here, Butler is arguing that the idea of having a coherent self is based upon and only made possible through the existence and mutual exchange of recognition with the Other. Yet, this exchange of recognition is also influenced by the existence of norms outside of these two parties' consciousness. These norms govern the ways in which one is able to conceive of recognition in general, ultimately guiding the ways in which a person identifies and is identified. The important implication here is that the existence and influence of these norms mean that control of

recognition and self-identification is not entirely in the subjects' control and is guided by broader social norms in a given context. Indeed, Butler (2001) claims that this "exchange is mediated by language, by conventions, by a sedimentation of norms that are social in character" (p. 23). Theoretically then, Mia's displacement from Mexico to Canada would mean a new environment with different social and cultural norms that may interrupt Mia's processes of recognition and identity making. Ultimately this means that Mia must re-experience this process under the influence of these new social norms as she returns again to the struggle to understand and position herself within an array of identity labels. In fact, the social aspect of sexual self-identification is undeniable, given that its most practical level is founded upon labelling that rests upon a finite set of socially available labels and terms that may have different connotations and value associations in different environments. The already difficult process of self-identification with concrete labels and terms can interact with changing social norms and connotations of those identity labels in a given society, and may be playing a part in Mia's difficulty finding one static term to define herself with. This experience of Mia's is reflective on Davies's (1989) understanding of identity making, that we "struggle with the diversity of experience to produce a story of ourselves which is unitary and consistent. If we do not, others demand of us that we do so" (p. 230). Butler (2001) sees it as "a certain ethical violence that demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same. For subjects who live in time this is a hard norm to satisfy, if not impossible" (p. 27). This is the case for Mia, as her sexuality is too complex and nuanced to express in one contextually contingent identity label. Instead, she feels that it is easier to define herself as 'lesbian' for its simple social intelligibility in light of these pressures, explaining her exact self-understanding further afterwards. Both Mia's use of the category of lesbian that she later modifies, as well as Ian's change from 'gay' to

‘questioning’ are examples of the inadequacy of identity politics to adequately and concretely express how these students understand their own sexualities, as well as the complication of self-identification that one experiences when changing social and cultural contexts.

Diya also indicated that she has difficulty finding a concise term to identify her sexuality. Instead, she uses numerous and sometimes conflicting terms to attempt to define her sexual orientation throughout the interview. When asked how she identifies her sexuality, Diya responded: “It’s kind of weird, cause I thought I identified as a lesbian but then, slowly I came to the realization that I might be, if you’ve heard of the term, demisexual or pansexual?” where 'demisexual' is defined as a person who only feels sexual attraction after forming emotional bonds with a person (AVENwiki "Demisexual", n.d.), or what Diya defines as being “mostly based on personality”. However, throughout the rest of the interview, Diya most often refers to herself as bisexual, while still using language which reflects uncertainty and indeterminacy in terms of explaining her sexual desire and attraction. This cycling between different labels for her sexuality suggests that like Ian and Mia, Diya is looking for a word to describe her complex sexual identity, but is unable to find an adequate one, resulting in her describing her sexuality in a multitude of ways. In all three of these instances, the students’ personal feelings and interpretation of their attractions exceed the simplistic identity categories offered to them. As a result they engage in processes of self-definition through a complex array of labels. Indeed, this situation is made even more complex as the labels they have available to them are culturally situated and can hold different connotations than they did in their previous countries, since "words and actions do not carry the same meanings and social significance at all times and in all places and with all groups of people" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 139). There is an undeniable socially contextual element of the labelling processes, as Renn (2010) points out: "identity seeks

recognition, yet depends on social relations and social knowledge to be recognized" (p. 136). This suggests that there is a contextual element to comprehending one's own identity and using a label to represent that identity. Therefore, the precise meanings and connotations associated with a particular label or sexual identity category may be different in a different context, ultimately complicating Diya's relationship to available sexual identity terms as her cultural environment has changed during her study abroad. While Ian and Mia do not offer up a direct timeline for the process in which they are attempting to define their own sexual identities, Diya goes into further detail about the effects that her international exchange had on her sexual self-understanding.

The international journey had a direct impact on how Diya understood her sexuality and expressed her sexual self-identification. Diya explains how she was attracted to women and not attracted to men in Qatar, but yet found she was attracted to men after coming to Canada. She considered this happenstance in connection to her sexuality:

> Everyone was asking me out, like all the guys they were giving me flowers [in Qatar]. I wasn't attracted to any of them. So I was like maybe I'm just gay. Maybe this is why. But then I kind of realized I didn't, like the guys in my school were just not attractive inside out. And coming here I realized 'okay, maybe', like I've met some interesting people. Like boys, and girls. And I'm like 'okay, this isn't about gender, this is more about who the person is'.

Diya was not attracted to the males around her in Qatar, which indicated to her that she was a lesbian. Yet after she moved to Canada, for whatever reason, Diya felt attraction to men as well as women and had to re-evaluate her understanding of her sexuality. The change in her lived experiences when she came to Canada challenged her previous understandings about her sexuality. As a result, it indicated to her how much her environment and context impacted the

sexual orientation categories that she identified herself with as she moved from Qatar to Canada. While it is impossible to know why she was not attracted to men in Qatar and later held attraction to men in Canada, this change reflects difficulty in placing her sexuality into static sexual identity labels as she understands her sexuality differently in different places. Davies (1989) confirms this as she claims:

> within the post-structuralist paradigm, that the individual is not so much the product of some process of social construction that results in some relatively fixed end-product but is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate (p. 229),

which suggests that Diya's various experiences shape her as an individual. It is then understandable that she chooses to cycle through various terms for describing her sexuality as her sexual identity remains unfixed and subject to contextual negotiation. For Ian, Mia, and Diya it is apparent that their identity is fluid and complex as they grow and encounter new experiences. Therefore, stable identity categories are not sufficient for properly describing sexual identities. Indeed, queer theorists who study the nature of identity believe that "the very notion of identity as a coherent and abiding sense of self is perceived as a cultural fantasy rather than a demonstrable fact" (Jagose, 1996, p. 82). It confirms the impossibility of finding a concrete label that will completely and consistently define the international queer students' sexualities across space and time.

These queer international students who are indeterminate in their self-labelling appear to be experiencing a symptom of what queer theory argues is an inability for identity politics to offer perfect labels that permanently represent every person and sexual orientation (Jagose, 1996; Wilchins, 2004, Davies, 1989). Indeed, Jagose (1996) analyzes a quote by Clausen, an author

focusing on gender and feminism, who experiences similar problems as the aforementioned students with the efficacy of identity labels:

> I do not want to become an identity junkie, hooked on the rush that comes with pinning down the essential characteristic that, for the moment, seems to offer the ultimate definition of the self, the quintessence of oppression, the locus of personal value – only to be superseded by the next revelation. (p.17)

> Instead of demanding that the category 'lesbian' should be broadened so as to represent her sexuality, Clausen suggests that its inability to do so – its representation of her sexual trajectory as treacherous or misguided – demonstrates its limitations; that is, the necessary limitations of identity politics. (pp. 68-69)

While critiquing some of the connotations involved with limited and discrete identity labels that cover a wide variety of sexual orientations, Clausen and Jagose pinpoint the narrow and limited function of identity labels in describing fluid human characteristics. While discussing the commonality assumed in the term 'gay' in the realm of queer activism, Jagose (1996) also quotes Ed Cohen who:

> writes of his difficulty in identifying with the category 'gay man' because he finds that term's implicit claims to collectivity unpersuasive: 'By predicating "our" affinity upon the assertion of a common "sexuality", we tacitly agree to leave unexplored any "internal" contradictions which undermine the coherence we desire from the imagined certainty of an unassailable commonality or of an incontestable sexuality. (pp. 91-92)

These ideas reflect that the common terms available for sexual identity categories, such as 'lesbian' or 'gay' suggest a unified and stable experience of sexuality. This unfortunately also forces people to leave behind or discard any complications or nuanced differences within their

identities. It can be inferred that this was the problem for the international students who discussed their identities above. Ian, in a continual process of self-identification leaves behind the term ‘gay’ and rests on ‘questioning’. Regardless of being a unified term for sexual orientation, ‘questioning’ is unstable and rejects the static immutability of other common sexual identity labels. Mia offers up one of these common terms of ‘lesbian’ but also modifies and adjusts the word with further amendments to attempt to express her complex sexuality more clearly. Finally, Diya uses multiple terms and some explanatory sentences to attempt to explain her complicated sexuality which defies expectations and appears fluid over time and space as her attractions change. Indeed, especially in the case of Diya who experienced different sexual attractions across various physical and cultural spaces, the participants' appeared to be in an active process of identity making as influenced by differing social and cultural constructions and connotations of those sexual identities between their home countries and Canada. The altered social and cultural contexts change the nature of these labels and the intensity of the pressure to use them, giving their identification processes an added complexity as they cycled through available sexual identity labels.

5.3 Self-Acceptance and Opinions on Queer Sexuality

While some of the interviewed international queer students faced difficulties expressing their sexual identities using the labels available to them, some international students’ reflections on their sexualities were even more complex as they changed their perceptions of homosexuality in general. Particularly for those international students who came to Canada from countries with laws prohibiting homosexuality, studying in Canada also introduced them to a more accepting legal and cultural environment in terms of LGBTQ acceptance. It appears that some of the international queer students’ ideologies and perceptions on homosexuality carried with them

from what they term as their homophobic home countries have conflicted with the constructions of sexuality that they have encountered while in Canada. Indeed, Jessup-Anger (2008) claims that Twombly's (1995) study of female international students in Costa Rica indicates that that "students bring their own socially constructed identities and cultural assumptions to a host country [which] influence and in some cases may distort the ways in which students approach, endure, and reflect on their experiences" (p. 362). This type of experience was embodied for many international students in changing judgements on their own queer identities and a changing comfort level in terms of explicitly embracing or acknowledging themselves as sexual minorities.

Ian was one such student that had differing perceptions on homosexuality after moving to Canada. He discusses his changing opinion of the term gay after moving to Canada:

> When I came here actually, the very first weekish I didn't like the term gay. And even before then, coming from the Caribbean I just didn't like the term gay. ... I just feel like there's so much baggage that comes along with being gay, and stereotypes that I feel like I would need to fill. … So I don't think it's very fair to say that I fit into the box of gay. But then I sort of came to realize it doesn't really matter and that's just the term that people use for it.

After coming to Canada, Ian experiences a change in his comfort level with gay as an identity category. His initial concern was over stereotypical connotations associated with being gay or assuming a gay identity. Indeed, David Halperin, as quoted by Jagose (1996) discusses the prevalence and problem of stereotypical associations with the gay sexual identity:

> gay life has generated its own disciplinary regimes, its own techniques of normalization, in the form of obligatory haircuts, T-shirts, dietary practices, body piercing, leather

> accoutrements, and physical exercise ... discursive structures and representational systems that determine the production of sexual meanings, and that micromanage individual perceptions, in such a way as to maintain and reproduce the underpinnings of heterosexist privilege. (p. 92)

As Halperin notes, these perceptions and connotations of gayness are spread and ultimately make pejorative the meaning of gayness, helping to enforce heterosexuality as the dominant form of sexuality. Indeed, Ian has noticed the perception of gayness and all the listed stereotypes that are associated with it. While Ian previously disliked the stereotype and, therefore, disliked gay as an identity label or category, he came to accept the word 'gay' and became comfortable with it in the Canadian university context. This became apparent when he stated that "it doesn't really matter and that's just the term that people use for it". The timeline on which Ian suggests he became more comfortable, a "weekish" after coming to Canada, is noteworthy and suggests that his increased comfort with the 'word' may have something to do with his change of environment. In his experience, there was a noticeable difference in cultural acceptance of LGBTQ people between what he terms as his homophobic previous country of BVI and Canada, meaning that likely the connotations and ideological underpinnings of the term 'gay' around him have changed. This is understandable as Kumashiro (2002) claims that "words and actions do not carry the same meanings and social significance at all times and in all places and with all groups of people" (p. 139). In this case, 'gay' appears to have very different connotations in BVI and Canada that have influenced Ian and his level of comfort with it in this latter context. Differences in linguistic meanings may also have had an effect on the negotiations with labels that the students experienced in the previous section. Ian's differing fondness for the term gay after he moved to Canada can be seen as he changes perception of what 'gay' means after moving to a

new and what he perceived as a more accepting culture. Many of the other international queer students experienced similar phenomena of changing perceptions of what gayness and homosexuality mean in a different or unfamiliar cultural context.

Jose, an international student from Brazil, also undergoes a change in his perception of homosexuality when attempting to explain his queer self-identification and mediates between an opinion of approval and condemnation of homosexuality. When questioned on his sexual self-identification, Jose embarked on a nervous and unsure route of speech:

> Jose: Okay. I guess it was when I had six years – not sure. Uh, around six years. So I uh, starting to feel something wrong… [laughs]
>
> E: [laughs]
>
> Jose: That's not so wrong. It's kind of normal.
>
> E: Yeah.
>
> Jose: Yeah?
>
> E: For sure.

While Jose's first association of his non-normative sexuality is to identify it as "wrong", he reminds himself before I intercede that it is not wrong and then confirms that with me. While this could be a strategy of gauging the opinions of his audience as he shares personal details with me, it also shows that he is unsure and careful of how his sexual identity will be received by others. His flitting between condemnation and acceptance of his sexuality indicates an unsureness of opinion on homosexuality as he looks to me, a fellow Canadian student for confirmation of its acceptance. Indeed, his attempt to confirm his secondary connotation of acceptance with me suggests he is looking to his environment and the people surrounding him for some confirmation of his own perspectives on sexuality. Directly after the quotes explaining his sexuality above,

Jose referred to the difficulty he experienced with his sexuality in Brazil, saying, “but it’s a problem to me, because it’s about my family and some future in Brazil.” This indicates that the negativity and fear he felt towards his sexuality seems to stem from the difficulty it evokes within the context of his Brazilian town and the realm of his family. He later explains how he feels the Canadian campus is an accepting environment in contrast with his experiences in Brazil:

> [In Brazil] you don’t see a lot of difference between people in the streets and university. So if you are different, [people] look at you in a different way. And here [in Canada] it’s so common that pfft, nobody cares about it.

Jose points to the different ways that homosexuality is normalized or not in different cultural contexts, as he believes difference and homosexuality to be a problem in Brazil but not so much in Canada. However, as he has lived in these two differing environments he must mediate two differing cultural constructions of sexuality, as well as consider the implications for expressing his own sexuality in these two different locations. This perhaps contributes to the conflicting ways in which Jose thinks about and describes his sexual identity. Jose perceives the differences with his sexuality as problematic in the context of Brazil which contrasts with his experience in Canada where he feels it is more accepted. Consequently his opinion on homosexuality seems to be affected, indicated by his oscillations between condemning and accepting his homosexual identity. Like Ian, Jose’s move to Canada has introduced him to differing perceptions of gayness and its 'rightness', 'wrongness', and stereotypes and he is interrogating these new connotations and trying to come to a new understanding of his own sexual identity. Evidence of these conflicting ideologies is also present in how Jose discusses taking part actively in the LGBTQ community.

Further indication of a conflict in opinion on homosexuality can be seen in Jose's contradictory and undecided stance on participation in LGBTQ communities. When asked if Jose wanted to be more involved with the LGBTQ community on campus, Jose states:

> But, I don't know, actually, if I can join this community. Maybe it's a prejudice against myself. ... Cause sometimes I cannot identify myself with this community, even. .... But sometimes I guess it's good? Yeah. It's an opportunity to know me better and to make some friends. When I hear that you can interact with a lot of groups and communities and people don't care. Nobody knows me here. So yeah. So I guess it could be a good opportunity and to have some fun and make some friends and… it's good, yeah.

His language around considering participation in the LGBTQ community wavers between negativity and positivity. He begins by claiming that he may have a prejudice against himself and that he cannot identify with the LGBTQ community, but eventually comes to change his mind and state the benefits of taking part in the community for self-learning and the chance to socialize. Such a degree of comfort, however, is afforded by his assertion of his anonymity in a context where no one from his community back home in Brazil can monitor his sexuality and engagement with the LGBTQ community in his host country. However, Jose expresses concern about gossip reading his sexual identity in both Canada and Brazil, and when asked directly if he felt that people would not be his friend if they heard he was gay, his response is contradictory and represents a conflicted point of view:

> Yeah, but uh…Um… I guess yes. And at the same time it could be um, I don't mean better, but people knowing that I am gay they can chat with me about this, so I can make other friends or real friends, yeah. So it could be better and bad at the same time.

In this instance as well Jose oscillates between a fear that people will not be his friend if they know that he is gay and his belief that if they know about his sexual orientation he can be open and make better friends, ultimately claiming that it is both a good and bad possibility. This is another element of how Jose sees his sexuality and the repercussions of it in different ways. He is not alone, however, in feeling this conflicting consciousness surrounding issues of his sexuality. Griffin's (1991) study found that closeted lesbian and gay elementary school teachers were also conflicted regarding their level of openness about their sexual identity, wanting to both conceal their sexuality to avoid potential fallout in schools, while simultaneously desiring being more open and no longer having to conceal their true selves. They also wanted to be open in order to freely address negative stereotypes of queer people that they encountered. These reflect very similar feelings on the part of Jose who was both worried about the consequences of being open with his sexuality, while at the same time wanting to be honest with people he met and talk over their potentially negative perceptions of homosexuality. Furthermore, like Ian who changed his opinion on gay as an identity category, Jose's straddling of two binary positions regarding his sexuality and its implications for his life can be seen as the navigation of two differing societal ideologies after he moves from Brazil to Canada. Insight into Jose's dual perception of his own sexuality can be understood by looking at the ways in which people identify themselves in relation to others. According to Douglas Crimp, as quoted by Britzman (1998):

> Identification is, of course, identification with an other, which means that identity is never identical to itself. This alienation from the self it constructs … does not mean simply that any proclamation of identity will only be partial, that it will be exceeded by other *aspects* of identity, but rather that identity is always a relation, never simply a positivity … [P]erhaps we can begin to rethink identity politics as politics of relational

identities formed through political identifications that constantly remake those identities. (p. 83)

Crimp's point here refers to how the process of self-identification involves continually comparing and contrasting one's self in relation to others, eventually finding commonality and difference with others that allows one to construct themselves as a unique and stable individual. When Jose comes to Canada then, he is still engaging in this process of identification in relation to others, perceiving difference and similarities between himself and those around him. However, in Canada there are legal sanctions and a degree of public acceptance of homosexuality and its normalization or depathologization in terms of how individuals think and perceive of same-sex relationships, which Jose has noticed as he believes no one really cares about such differences. Ultimately, this forces him to reassess his own identity as a sexual minority after coming to Canada, mediating that relation to the people and culture around him that has changed in perception and opinion of queer acceptance between Brazil and Canada. It appears that at the time of the interview this is exactly the process in which Jose was engaged in as his opinion on his queer identity appeared to flip between condemnation and acceptance. Indeed, he is not the only queer international student to experience such a process of identity reformulation and reflexivity after moving to Canada to study.

These conflicting perceptions of homosexuality are common in the group of queer international students interviewed, and for Zachary it is embodied in a seeming disconnect between himself and his gay identity. When discussing how transparent he was with his sexuality on campus, Zachary discusses his change in feelings of comfort when he first came to Canada saying that "I took a little time to, you know, I wasn't comfortable as yet to, you know. I still wouldn't go to you know, some gay event. ... But I'm more likely to do it now". Although

Zachary was not comfortable being open about his sexuality when he first came to Canada, he claims that he is more comfortable with it now, after graduating from his two year program. The time it took Zachary in Canada to become more comfortable openly expressing or acknowledging his gay identity is understandable considering that he came from a country where expressions of homosexuality are illegal and punishable by the state (Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013). Indeed, a report compiled by Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2006) indicates that for residents of Guyana it is difficult and dangerous for queer people to reveal their sexuality as homophobia and discrimination are common practice. The full extent of this homophobia has been embodied in the multiple discriminatory crimes against queer people in Guyana, including verbal and physical harassment, police brutality, and murder (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006). This undoubtedly contributes to why Zachary discusses how growing up in Canada versus Guyana would have likely made him more comfortable with his sexuality:

> I would think that growing up in this [Canadian] culture, you know, you would be a little more accepting of yourself, or less... you would know your rights and you would have rights as, you know mean, a gay person or a perceived gay person.

He believes that growing up in the Canadian context where he would be aware of legal protections of LGBTQ people would likely make him more comfortable with his sexuality, and indeed he also mentioned that after spending time in Canada he became more comfortable expressing his sexuality. This means that similar to the experiences of Ian and Jose, the environment affected how Zachary understood and perceived his own sexual identity, ultimately making him comfortable with his homosexuality and its expression.

Samuel, who came from another homophobic country of Jamaica, reports similar feelings to Zachary's in his study abroad. He also had the experience of coming to a renewed understanding of his sexuality. When discussing his sexual self-identification, Samuel claimed:

> I'm a gay man. This sort of association and um… only my sexual identity has been new to me so to speak. Because I'm from Jamaica where it is very homophobic and it is frowned upon to be gay or openly gay. I wouldn't consider myself openly gay but I am now more comfortable with my sexuality and becoming more confident about who I am and who I love and stuff like that.

It is interesting to note that throughout our interview, Samuel refers to his life in Jamaica as involving 'straight acting'[4] and hiding his homosexual identity, but now refers to his sexuality as new to him. It is obvious that he has always experienced same sex attraction, as he spoke of a male partner in Jamaica, but it appears rather that specifically identifying as a gay man and being confident and comfortable with that identity is a new experience for him. Indeed, he claims that the reason his sexual identity is new to him is because he was from a homophobic country where being openly gay was frowned upon, suggesting that it is likely his move to the more accepting and legally supportive context of Canada that brought about that change in self-perception as he was freer to express his gay sexual orientation without repercussions. Indeed, his compulsion to hide his sexuality in Jamaica is understandable in consideration of Jamaica's harshly homophobic environment, termed "The Most Homophobic Place on Earth" by *Times Magazine* in 2006 (Mintz, 2013). A national survey of Jamaica in 2012 indicated the extent of this homophobia as 46% of the study's participants claimed homosexuality made them feel "repulsion" and only 5.6% felt "acceptance" of gay people (Mintz, 2013). This feeling undoubtedly contributes to the

[4] The purposeful reinforcement of bodily appearances and characteristics of dominant masculinity that are associated with heterosexuality in order to repudiate non-normative gender characteristics that could be associated with homosexuality (Wayne Martino & Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005)

violent crimes that take place in Jamaica against queer people, such as home break-ins, physical attacks, and burnings of people and property (Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre, 2010), and the recent stabbing murder of a 16 year old boy reportedly seen wearing women's clothes and dancing with a man at a party (Mintz, 2013). For both Zachary from Guyana and Samuel from Jamaica, moving to Canada from their dangerous, homophobic, and identity suppressing home countries also entailed undergoing a re-examination of their sexuality through the more accepting lens of Canada's cultural understanding of homosexuality. All of the international queer students listed underwent changes in their understanding of sexuality in various forms because of the effect the environment had on the process of their identity formation.

All four of the listed queer international students reported renegotiating their understandings and perceptions of their sexualities in some form after moving to Canada. Ian reacted to different meanings of the word 'gay' in his new cultural context, ultimately increasing his comfort with the term. Jose oscillated between positive and negative opinions on his own homosexuality and the prospect of identifying within the LGBTQ community, reflecting the dual ideologies of his old and new country residence. Zachary and Samuel both had similar experiences in finding increased comfort and confidence with their homosexuality previously unknown to them in their home countries. In all these cases the students' perspectives, opinions, and feelings about their sexualities changed as they moved and explored their sexual identities in their host country. This is an unsurprising phenomenon for queer international students as "identities – including queer sexualities, but also including heterosexualities – can change in meaning and sociopolitical value in different historical and cultural contexts" (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 5). Indeed, the conditions under which varying understandings of sexuality emerge is underscored by Herdt (1993) who argues that "variations in sex and gender, including the

formation of third-sex and third-gender categories, roles and ontological identities are not universal; they vary across time and space." (p. 79). Jagose (1996) also points out that issues of sexuality become complicated "when worked across cultural or historical variations which raise the issue of whether 'homosexuality' is a constant term in radically different contexts" (p. 8). With differences like this in mind, it is easy to see how moving to Canada where there are legal and human rights protections in place for sexual minorities has some impact on further normalizing and legitimating same-sex relationships which is quite different in some of the students' home countries. Such varying contexts affect how non-normative sexuality is perceived and understood, as the students in the study reveal. It is natural that their identity making would be continually affected by the cultural context and the people around them as "identity […] is an effect of identification with and against others: being ongoing, and always incomplete, it is a process rather than a property" (Jagose, 1996, p. 79). The aforementioned international students' international sojourns had an effect on their processes of self-identification, influencing their understandings and perceptions of sexual identity roles as they engaged with different norms, cultural constructions of and degrees of repression and prohibition against homosexuality. For some students who came from particularly homophobic and repressive environments who were forced to hide and repress their sexuality, this reconfiguration of identity also appears to have revealed new depths of self-understanding and learning.

5.4 Self-Understanding and Re-examining the Double Life

Three out of the seven interviewed students moved to Canada from countries where homosexuality is illegal, and all of these students were engaged in some manner of 'straight acting' in their home countries. Some referred to this straight acting as living a double life, as they were living out a dichotomy in their home countries between straight acting in public and

freely expressing their queer orientations in private circles. However, as they moved to Canada where it is not illegal to be queer, their dichotomous double life is no longer necessary from a legal standpoint. Indeed, most of the queer students appeared to be more comfortable expressing their sexuality within the Canadian legal and cultural context to certain degrees. However, the process of breaking down and reconstructing their sexuality in a new context appears to be a complicated one. The students who do grapple with constructing and presenting a different expression of sexual identity do so using a variety of strategies, and each muse about their own varying elations and difficulties with processes of coming and being out.

Zachary was one such queer international student who presented as straight in Guyana but reformulated his relationship to his sexuality after moving to Canada. He discusses what it was like for him as a straight actor in Guyana:

> …you just kinda adapt and try to change your behaviour, you know. ... I was definitely playing a role, because you know mean, my sense of fashion… I tried to, you know, be as inconspicuous as possible. ... In your style of dress you try not to be too, you know, flamboyant or you just try to stick with what everyone is wearing. ... So you don't even know, you know mean, so you kinda just suppress a lot of things in addition to your sexuality, you know mean.

For Zachary, the reality of living his life in Guyana meant trying to blend in and suppress qualities about himself that he believed may indicate to others that he is gay. The pressure to present a heterosexual identity is strong in Guyana because of its laws against homosexuality, homophobic cultural attitudes, and lack of protection for queer people (Brekke, 2014) that have resulted in criminal acts against sexual minorities including harassment and murder (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006). The qualities that he tried to suppress in order to appear

straight were likely characteristics traditionally considered feminine, as it is believed that "disavowed male homosexuality culminates in a heightened or consolidated masculinity, one which maintains the feminine as the unthinkable and unnameable" (Butler, 1990, p. 4).

Indeed, Zachary's ability to present a straight identity likely involves altering the perception of his gender to one of hyper-masculinity in order to distance himself from stereotypes of feminine male homosexuals. Playing such a role to satisfy a society's expectation of gender is actually a common one as the totality of gender itself is believed to be in essence a role play. Butler (1997) believes that gender is not a natural, immutable, or innate quality but rather a social construction, and that one perceives of what these constructions are and embodies them in a performance. According to her, "gender is in no way a stable identity of locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1997, p. 402). It consists of "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds [that] constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 1997, p. 402). In fact, Zachary disguises himself as a heterosexual male to satisfy the conditions of his homophobic Guyanese social world because as Butler (2004) argues, 'doing gender' "is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint [...as...] one is always 'doing' gender with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary" (p. 1). Ultimately, when all gender is seen as a performance, then the disguise of heterosexuality through Zachary's performance of hyper-masculinity would theoretically be indecipherable from another normative heterosexual male's own performance of the same thing. It is then understandable that with the years of Zachary's continued performance of masculine heterosexuality, it is difficult for Zachary to learn and feel comfortable expressing a different

gender and sexual identity than he had been previously, regardless of whether the pressure to do so has lessened in Canada's environment that has laws that protect the rights of LGBTQ citizens.

Though it is difficult to terminate his straight acting, the lessening of this strong pressure to act straight is clear. This is indicated by his comments about Canada when he claims, "it's just been gorgeous to be here [in Canada] and you know, … you're not like, conscious that you're gay every moment of every day". Indeed, his remarks that he can let go of constantly thinking about his gay sexual minority status illuminates the extent to which his sexuality was a constant concern for him in Guyana. Due to the threat of violence enacted upon queer people in Guyana, it was of the utmost importance that Zachary present a convincing heterosexual identity through this performance in order to stay safe. In Canada as he is removed from this threat he is able to let go of this intensive self-monitoring, relax, and express himself as he wishes. Yet, he does describe how letting go of this tendency to hide his sexuality in doing things such as clothes shopping in Canada is a slow and gradual process:

> It's not like in Canada now everything is fine. … You're still finding yourself basically and trying to go back and you know mean… yeah, I do like, I do like this colour, you know what I mean. But … because time and time again and years you've been denying yourself and telling yourself 'Oh no, you can't wear this, wear that' or whatever, it's almost like you don't know what you like in a way. … Like if I go to the mall I would see something I like but I wouldn't even be conscious of it because you already know that you don't wear that for instance. So it's like a relearning almost, because you look at things and 'yeah, maybe I could try this, maybe it's not as bright a colour'. … I know it sounds corny but it's finding yourself in a way, you know, and rediscovering you know,

> things that you like that you didn't even, you weren't even conscious you liked because you just block it out right away, you know.

As homosexuality is legal in Canada he no longer has to hide his sexuality and act straight, but in order to terminate that cycle of straight acting Zachary also had to struggle to rediscover the qualities and characteristics he had been suppressing for so long. This is a similar experience to one of Griffin's (1991) homosexual elementary school teacher participants who hid their sexual identity for so long that they claimed: "My protectiveness has become so natural, I don't even know I'm doing it" (p. 196). While Zachary expresses this search for qualities and affinities which he has so long suppressed and forgotten as a process of 'rediscovery', what Zachary is doing can also be seen as reformulating his expressible identity within a new cultural context. This is because there is a strong social pressure to identify one's self within allowable and condoned discourses in a given heteronormative society. According to Wilchins (2004), drawing on Foucaultian theories:

> Disciplinary society aimed to produce 'docile bodies' – perfect, uniform citizens who had internalized a sense of personal visibility, self-consciousness, and social norms. This process produced individuals for whom the greatest fear – even in their most private moments and particularly in their private sexual activities – was to be thought abnormal. (p. 68)

Zachary acted straight and hid his homosexuality in his public life in Guyana because of this strong pressure to conform to society's heteronormative and gender normative expectations. In the same process, he responds to the differing social expectations in Canada. In Canada, Zachary ultimately works to reveal and embrace suppressed qualities that are associated with homosexuality in his home country as he feels more free to express a gay identity in his host

country. To his satisfaction, Zach is reformulating his identity as he is relocating it within a different context and according to social norms that validate human rights anti-discrimination for sexual minorities. Indeed, according to Kumashiro (2002) and the theorists he draws upon, "that which society defines as 'normal' is a socially contested construct (Apple, 1995) that both regulates who we are supposed to be and denigrates whoever fails to conform to 'proper' or 'normal' roles (Greene, 1996)" (p. 45). Zachary's struggle with rediscovering himself is essentially constructing a new identity that is acceptable within his changed environment as Canada's legal framework is different than the one in his home country of Guyana.

Samuel is also from a similar country where homosexuality is illegal and criminalized and he feels compelled to act straight. He too has a similar experience with his sexuality after coming to Canada. After coming to Canada to study, Samuel feels fractured regarding his stance on his sexual identity. He discusses the heteronormative necessity to conform and to act straight in Jamaica to ensure his own safety:

> It's about living a double life. ... When you're in your social class, your safe zone, you can enact your ... sexuality in whatever way you want. But when you go probably out to work, or if you go to socialize on the street scene it's a different sort of enactment, you know, more along the lines of conformity which ... I have an issue with.

We can compare this description of needing to conform in Jamaica to his description of learning to let go of the conformity within the more accepting Canadian university climate as he describes what it is like to adjust to be studying in Canada:

> You're trying ... to get acclimatized ... to the situation here because it's as if it's surreal. You're wondering you know, is this real? So it affects you for a while. ... So it's like a conflict within yourself, trying to deal with what exists here as opposed to what you're

> coming from. ... For me for the international student you come with a lot of baggage. ... When the two, dealing with your baggage from back home and then dealing with a situation where it's free, people are open, it can be conflicting inside, dealing with the two dynamics.

While Zachary presents his change of identification after coming to Canada as a rediscovery of a suppressed self, Samuel paints his conflict with his identity in terms of conflicting dynamics. His description of his experience being "surreal" reflects the extent to which his environment and the differing cultural constructions of sexuality have changed providing him with never before imagined possibilities for expressing and living his sexual identity as a sexual minority. Within Jamaica, for Samuel, his sexuality was a problem that he had to hide because in that context homosexuality is illegal and considered immoral, which has resulted in harassment and crimes committed against Jamaican queer people (Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre, 2010; The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007; Mintz, 2013). However, as he moves to Canada and perceives of a different, more accepting construction of sexuality he realizes his old relationship to his sexuality as one he must hide to remain safe is no longer legally necessary. However, as Canada provides him a legal and socially sanctioned space in which, like Zachary, he can reconfigure his sexual identity without fear of repercussion or demonization and pathologization, he still finds difficulty and insecurity in expressing himself after hiding that sexuality for so long. Ultimately, this is characterized by the sense of surrealness or conflict that he describes experiencing in his time as an queer international student. Samuel and Zach are both experiencing a reconfiguration of their identity as they learn how to express their sexual identities in a society that gives them the legal and cultural space to do so.

Diya from Qatar, the final student interviewed from a country in which homosexuality is criminalized, also reported similar experiences. She claims that she had to carefully hide her sexuality in what she believed to be a homophobic Qatar, but has since re-evaluated how she perceives her sexuality in what she sees as a more accepting Canada. Diya recalls instances in Qatar where the necessity to hide her sexuality from her family or her peers forced her to play a role or lie. These include changing her behaviour in school as she says:

> If a guy was really nice and really good to me I'd have to find an excuse to tell him no [in regards to dating]. I can't do this. I can't tell them I'm gay. I can't tell them well, I don't find you attractive, cause then they'd be insecure or whatever.

In another instance of hiding her sexuality, Diya recalls: "I think this one time my mom caught me checking out a girl and then I was like 'uh, I like her pants'". While Diya doesn't describe experiences of self-discovery like Zach's and Samuel's, she does discuss struggling with a sense of isolation and loss when she first came to Canada. After telling me how important she felt the friends she has made since coming to Canada were, as she is now in second year, and how she is open with them, Diya mentions:

> I've had that experience first year. I was completely isolated cause I was new here. It was hard to make friends and I kind of lost my sense of self. And I felt kind of unattached to who I am. I didn't know who I was.

She further discusses her experience with adjustment when she first came to Canada:

> I took my time. I had to take time to kind of know what it's like here and understand what is, what I can do, what I can't do, where I can go if I felt like doing something in support of the cause.

The cause she refers to is queer activism, and this suggests that like Samuel and Zachary who reconfigured their identities in relation to a new cultural validation of homosexuality, Diya too perceived differences in what a queer identity might entail as she relocated from Qatar to Canada. For her, there was an active process involved in learning the common components of Canadian queer identity expression as she claims she took time to learn what she could do and not do. This feeling of a change is further explained when she responds to the question of whether her perspective changed after arriving in Canada:

> Yeah, I think, definitely drastically changed. I went from casting away my Arab identity - I didn't want anything to do with it. I didn't want anything to do with religion. ... Like I just wanted to find myself. I kind of started on a blank page to being this person who kind of goes back and is proud of who they are. Like I'm proud of being gay. I'm proud of being Arab. I'm proud of being, like, not Muslim.

Her discussion of "casting away her identity" and becoming a blank slate perhaps reflects similar process of Zach and Samuel's experiences of reconfiguring a new identity and engaging with conflicting cultural constructions of sexuality in her old and new home. She first had to shed the identity she created for herself in Qatar of hiding her sexuality, to becoming a blank slate or person without a fixed identity, and finally to building a new identity in her new cultural context of being proud of her ethnic background and sexual orientation. Indeed, it is likely that she was previously unable to reconcile her Arab heritage and sexual orientation because she resided in Qatar where Islamic law expressly condemns homosexual identities (*The Economist* "Islam and Homosexuality", 2012). As a first step in trying to embrace her sexual identity, she "cast away" her Arab identity, likely rejecting her ethnicity altogether in order to reject the Muslim religion of her upbringing. Within Qatar, secular state and religious law are combined (U.S. Bureau of

Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012) and therefore as she grew up in this region it would have been difficult to separate what it meant to be an Arab from the homophobic discourse of Muslim law, perhaps contributing to the conflict she felt between her queer identity and what she took to be the homophobic basis of her heritage. After moving to Canada and removing herself from this legal and religious environment of Qatar that condemned homosexuality, however, Diya was able to separate her ethnic background as an Arab from the homophobic discourse of the Muslim religion, ultimately coming to balance pride as a non-Muslim Arab and queer individual. In the change of context between the legally queer condemning Qatar and legally queer rights protecting Canada, Diya was able to reconfigure her identity and hybridize these two parts of herself and be comfortable defining herself as both a non-Muslim Arab and a queer individual. Diya's experiences match the process of identity building that Sumara & Davis (1998) describe. They claim "identity is influenced by past experiences" such as in Diya's time in Qatar, yet "the human sense of self [...] constantly shifts – moving this way and that along with the fluid topographies of experience" such as in Diya's changed experiences in cultural surroundings (Sumara & Davis, 1998, p. 197). All three of these students underwent changes of identity as they left repressive cultures where expression of queer identities were illegal and came to study in Canada where legal and cultural frameworks supported the freedom of expression of queer people.

All three of these participants who left behind a homophobic and repressed sexual identity in their home country reconstructed their identities and reflected on how they expressed them within the Canadian university context. This is evidence of the fluid and transient nature of identities in general, as they are not stable and are altered through time and space. Indeed, queer theorists believe that the idea of a stable, fixed, and natural sexuality is a delusion and that

instead “sexuality is a discursive effect […] that does not assume for itself any specific materiality or positivity” (Jagose, 1996, p. 98). Therefore, for international queer students it is likely that they will experience a change in construction of that sexual identity as there is no innate identity common to all queer people that the students would be consistently maintaining in their travels. Identity making is also a relational process that continually involves comparing and contrasting one’s self to the constructed identities around them in a process of "inclusion" and "disclusion", or finding shared or unshared characteristics that make them feel affiliated and similar to another person or different and excluded, respectively (Pinar, 1998, pp. 6-7). In the case of these international queer students, the constructed identities of people surrounding them have drastically changed in a different cultural and social context where there are different norms governing the comfortability of being out and the legal status afforded to sexual minorities. Indeed, Herdt (1993) claims:

> Historical and social formations create for cultural actors what we might call mainstreams and margins, social arenas which cultural spaces and social places define by who does what with whom and under what normative circumstances their actions are approved or disapproved. (p. 55)

This means that the historical and social context that the international students are relocating to may be different than their previous countries’ cultural norms and the repressive legal conditions under which they are compelled to live as sexual and gender minorities. With that in mind, Butler (1997) points to the power of context to shape the portrayal of identity which she perceives of as a performance, discussed above. According to her:

> The act that gender is, the act that embodied agents *are* inasmuch as they dramatically and actively embody and, indeed, *wear* certain cultural significations, is clearly not one’s

> act alone. Surely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that on does it *in accord* with certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individualized matter. (p. 409)

As gender expression is not a "fully individualized matter", an individual may not consciously realize or actively participate in the totality of their self-expression of identity. Indeed, Butler is asserting that cultural prescriptions may account for the other aspect of control of this self-expression, tying in with the power of the students' changes in cultural environments to influence or encourage a reconfiguration of their identity. Understanding that normative sexual identities change from culture to culture and that identities are constantly shifting and relational to other surrounding identities provides insight for understanding the various reconfigurations of sexual identity that the queer international students report. Ultimately this freedom to be out and to experiment appears to be a good thing as all of aforementioned international students expressed content with the level of acceptance they felt to express their queer identities in the Canadian university context. While students experienced a breakdown of the double life and the reconfiguration of a freely expressible queer identity within Canada, some were still negotiating complex issues of maintaining their previously suppressed queer identity- not being out and able to declare their sexuality- when in contact with their home countries.

5.5 Self-Understanding and Re-examining the Double Life II - Relation and Influence of Home Country

For some of the queer international students interviewed who felt compelled to disguise and hide their sexual identity in their home countries, the pressure to divide their expressible identities between gay and straight still continued in some form after moving to Canada. As many students were constructing permissible gay identities in the Canadian university context,

they were still maintaining the presentation of their straight acting identities when in contact with their families or friends who were in or connected to their home country in some way. While it would seem that their self-expression would become consolidated and simpler within Canada as they no longer had to maintain a public straight and private identity, in reality the addition of another cultural context provided extra complication to their maze of self-expression. As they left their homes in which they had carefully tailored an expressible sexual identity that suited the requirements and social expectations of that culture, they were not merely able to decisively abandon that identity in place of another openly homosexual identity in Canada. The influence and connection to their home culture and social world remained and some of the students were forced to continue balancing these two identities even from a distance in Canada. Indeed, these students were faced with an even more complicated task of navigating discrete roles of sexual identity expression in their home country with yet another presentation or role that they tailor to the Canadian context. Instead of a basic dichotomy of living out a public heterosexual life and a private openly gay life in their home countries, the addition of a third social context of living in a country that was more legally and culturally supportive of queer expression forced the students to navigate even more situational contexts in which they were compelled to decide to what degree they would be open with their sexuality. This balancing of expressible identity mirrors the findings of a study by Griffin (1991) in which elementary school teachers navigated deciding which moments they could reveal their sexuality at the fear of being discovered as openly gay by the wrong people and losing their jobs. Like the international queer students in this study, Griffin (1991) found that because the lesbian or gay teachers:

> were employing different categories of identity management with different people in school, [they] had to keep track of which people and situations required what strategies.

> They also had to assess the need for changing strategies when that was appropriate. Consequently, throughout the school day, participants were engaged in a dynamic process of assessing and adjusting how they presented themselves, depending upon where they were in the school building and what colleagues or students they were with. (pp. 199-200)

Griffin (1991) ultimately found that:

> deciding how to manage one's identity is a complex and on-going decision-making process requiring the balancing of intense feelings of fear with the need for self-integrity and integration. [...] Going to work was like taking several journeys all at the same time; these participants were in different places with different people in school. Some of these destinations were final, with others were transitional. Keeping track of the travel itinerary required constant attention. (p. 200)

The international LGBTQ students from Guyana, Brazil, and Qatar who still hide their sexuality and feel compelled to pass as straight in their home countries manage this maze of identity presentation in different ways, constantly vigilant as to what degree of openness they could be about their sexuality in every context that they live in.

When visiting his home of Guyana, Zachary maintains his straight acting in attempting to pass as straight, and hopes that his friends will never find out about his sexuality. Even though he is comfortable with the idea of coming to express a perceivably gay identity in Canada, he does not want his Guyanese friends or anyone else in Guyana to learn about his queer sexuality. He expresses the separation he would like to maintain between Guyana and Canada in terms of revealing his sexuality: “when you know [people are] separate from your world of Guyana, and there’s no way that these worlds could come together, then you’re more willing to tell people,

you know." Although he does also claim that when he returns to Guyana to visit he does not worry about concealing his sexuality to the same degree as he did when he lived in Guyana before ever moving to Canada, because he knows he will be returning to his home in Canada. Zachary's experience of studying at Central University in Canada appears to have given him a place and space where he feels comfortable enough to choose to construct and express a more openly gay sexual identity than what he could express in Guyana, but this new constructed identity is not a permanent and static identity that he will carry forward in the future in all circumstances. Like the way in which his identity was fluid and changed shape when he first moved to Canada, his newly constructed identity in the Canadian context is also fluid and reshaped as he relates to the context of Guyana. This is because identity "exists only as it is constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed" (Renn, 2010, p. 136), such as in the way Zachary's identity is shaped and negotiated in different countries. Indeed, this was also a finding in Kettle's (2011) study of international students in Australia where some students claimed to modify their behaviour, although unrelated to sexuality, to suit their new Australian environment. Some of these students believed it was a permanent change and others believed it would change again into their old type of behaviour after returning to their home countries (p. 10). This is another example of the fluidity of identity in various contexts. Zachary experiences a mix of these identity changes as he returns to presenting a straight identity when he returns home for visits in Guyana, but feels more comfortable with his sexuality in Canada. However, his experiences also differ from Kettle's study in that his experiences in a more liberal environment have left a deep impact on his relationship to his homosexual identity that does not fluctuate. The time he has spent in Canada has altered his identity and his perspective such that when he returns to acting straight in the Guyanese context it is different because he is more comfortable with his

sexuality than he was when he permanently resided in Guyana. This is clear from his indication that during visits he was less worried about the efficacy and opaqueness of his heterosexual disguise. As Zachary moves to Canada and has new learning experiences, he is negotiating a different cultural context that affects the ways in which he presents his identity in Canada, but also disrupts the continuity and alters the expression of his identity in his home country.

Another student from another repressive context in terms of criminalization and official repudiation of homosexuality- Diya from Qatar-also manages levels openness regarding her sexual identity that she is able to express in different places. For Diya, her ultimate concern is that her family does not find out about her homosexuality, as she considers her family homophobic and is afraid of their retaliation. When asked if the anti-homosexual laws were the reason for why she was not open about her sexuality in Qatar, she responded by saying that her family was more of a concern:

> Yeah, and mostly my parents, really. Like I can't really tell them cause, there it's very common if a parent found out that their son or daughter [was gay] either they disown them, either they would make their life hell or they'd basically kill them, like literally. So, I never - I don't plan on telling them anytime soon.

For Diya, her ultimate concern while living in Qatar as an LGBTQ person was the fear that her family would find out about her sexuality, be unaccepting, and disown or endanger her. The fact that she feels that her life could be at risk attests to the extent to which living under a repressive regime where homosexuality is disavowed and actually criminalized carries with deep psychic consequences for living openly as a sexual minority or expressing same-sex desire in any public way. Above and beyond the discriminatory laws and violence that queer people are susceptible to in Qatar, her family was her biggest fear and ultimate concern. Therefore, the biggest reason

for hiding her sexuality and enacting a heterosexual identity was because she was afraid of her family discovering her sexual orientation. Yet, while Diya is physically removed from her parent's household, she still feels a remnant of this fear in her life in Canada because of the presence of her extended family that she resides with in Canada. She is still forced to maneuver how she expresses her identity in various contexts in her life in Canada because of the threat of her family's presence.

Regardless of whether Diya is physically situated in Qatar or Canada, her family's beliefs about homosexuality and the threat of the consequences of her family knowing are still present and do not stay contained within the physical borders of Qatar. Her experiences reflect similar experiences to those of a group of Arab students interviewed in Ikizler's (2013) study. These students reported difficulty with family pressures related to their ethnic and religious backgrounds that conflicted with their sexual minority identities even within an American university context. Like Ikizler's participants and like Zachary, Diya is able to build a life for herself in Canada on Central campus where she feels free to express her sexuality without fear of recrimination or threat to her physical and psychological well-being. Despite this, she still must negotiate passing as straight in some situations or contexts even in her host country.

Diya’s experiences are in line with Griffin's (1991) belief that "there are patterns of identity management among members of stigmatized social groups who conceal their identity" (p. 201). In any given situation, sexual minorities still feel compelled to manage their sexual identities as there is much risk regarding whether or not they will be accepted or penalized. This is because as a stigmatized minority they still experience certain heteronormative conditions and constraints in spite of the degree of broader official and legal acceptance of their status as sexual minorities within these contexts. This is evident for Diya in particular as because above and

beyond the hiding she does when she is in contact with her family, she is still concerned about expressing a queer sexual identity to particular students on campus.

Diya still mediates the degree to which she can be open with expressing a homosexual identity on campus when she is with Canadian students as compared to foreign students whom she is afraid may be connected to her family. When discussing her level of comfort with being open with her sexuality on campus, Diya claims that she is comfortable with students on campus:

> As long as they're not completely … what do you call it? I don't even want to say Muslim, like religious. Completely religious and completely not accepting of the idea, just because, not that I care what they think, like I really don't. I just care cause my family's really big here. I care about word getting to them. That's all I care about. But them, like these people, I really don't care what they think.

While in the less repressive Canadian cultural context Diya does not mind being open with her sexual identity and does not care about the opinion of others, there is a caveat in that her comfort being open remains somewhat restricted by the fact that her home culture in the form of her homophobic family is still a present concern in her life. She is threatened by the possibility that students who share the same ethnic and religious background as her will be in the same community as her family and will communicate her sexual identity to them. The pervasive surveillance of the broader religious community is a concern for her and she cannot escape the threat of the homophobic gaze and the expansive presence of her family network.

These conditions that she perceives to be based upon ever present religious beliefs as forms of homophobia compel her to engage in an intensified self-monitoring and self-surveillance that is motivated by a very real fear of being disowned and persecuted by her family. This is despite being within the Canadian context which legally protects and condones

the rights of LGBTQ residents. Her ability to construct an expressible queer identity is therefore made riskier and more complex as she must remain vigilant as to what degree she will share her sexual identity with various people in her life, based upon the level of influence she perceives homophobic religious background to have on students around her. Within Canada, she still feels tremendous pressure and fear that requires her to be intensely aware of the need to protect herself from any public detection that could lead any member of her family to gain knowledge of her sexuality, ultimately influencing the moments and the ways in which she is able to express her sexual identity even within a freer Canadian context.

Griffin (1991) encountered similar results in her study of the sexual expressions of gay and lesbian elementary school teachers, who experienced "pervasive and constant fear that was a part of the participants' everyday work experience and influenced all their decisions about how to maintain control over who in school knew about their gay and lesbian identities" (p.192). Diya's need to control and navigate who is aware of her sexual identity is similar to Zachary's experience as he remains conscious of maintaining his straight acting identity if there is a connection to his Guyanese world, and also similar to Paulo from Brazil whose connection to his family is relevant to the extent he can express his sexuality.

Paulo expresses a different degree of transparency surrounding his sexual identity directly in relation to his spatial distance from his Brazilian family. For him, as physical space between him and his family increases so too does his comfort with being open with his sexuality. Paulo claims that he is unsure but assumes his family knows about his homosexuality because of his transparency with his life on Facebook, and then later explains:

> I started not really care about what people say when I left [my birth city]. Because when I was there because I know how people are, I tried to be a little bit more careful. Yes.

> But… in [my second city] I decided like I was away from everybody I was just being myself, I decided to be myself. Yeah. So that's when I think [my family] started to like, know me a little bit more, but at that point I didn't care. I was doing my Master's. I had my money. Didn't need anybody. And now that I'm here I don't care like even less, so… and whatever.

As Paulo grew independent in his own life by moving away from his hometown and his family to pursue his Master's degree, he cared less about concealing his gay identity. He also felt freer to express his sexuality as his environments became consecutively more progressive in terms of LGBTQ acceptance. While it appears it was a combination of hiding his sexuality from his family as well as the residents of his hometown, it is clear that the act of moving away provided him with time, space, and an accepting environment that allowed him to be more open with his sexuality. This seems to indicate that perhaps if he were still living in his hometown he may still be struggling to hide his sexuality. Paulo is able to construct and express a different queer sexual identity while he has physical distance from his family and the people in his hometown because it has put him in a position of independence where the disposition and opinion of his family is no longer a threat to him. Though Zachary and Diya claim that they want to maintain that separation of identity indefinitely, Paulo does not indicate whether he would once again be careful about the extent to which he expressed his homosexuality if he returned home. Therefore, for some international students the distance from their home environments provides them with space to reconstruct and freely express a queer identity, but this may or may not necessarily change the identity they present in the context of their home country as evidenced by Zachary and Paulo's contrasting relationships to their home countries.

Indeed, Paulo's experience is a common one as "queer students living independently at college often feel a freedom to explore, research, and discuss their sexualities in ways they never felt they could while at home" (Rhoads as cited in Kumashiro, 2002, p. 12). Zach, Diya, and Paulo all feel a freedom to construct and express a homosexual identity within the Canadian university context. Yet they differ in the way Zach and Diya maintain a higher degree of secrecy regarding their sexualities when in the context of or in relation to their home countries and for Paulo the physical distance from his family has allowed him to embrace a homosexual identity in all contexts of his Canadian life. However, the experiences of the international students indicate overall that there are some parallels with the experience of coming out for many queer students in the sense that simply moving away from home, regardless of whether they still remain in the same cultural and political context, affords the possibility to explore one's sexuality away from the regulatory gaze of the family.

The tendency for some queer international students to maintain different identity expressions in different contexts is understandable as identities are believed to be shaped by social pressures and identity norms that surround them. Britzman (1998) references ideas of Paton's and claims that "travelers perform sexuality differently in different places. [Paton's] term *sexual landscapes*, or the geographies of sex, signals something about the polyvalency of the traveler's body and something about the polyvalency of cultural meanings" (pp. 63, 64), suggesting that identities are fluid in relation to their environment. In the case of the interviewed queer students, this means that like others they may be reconstructing their identities in different places as they react to identity norms and what they perceive as appropriate in the cultures around them. Instead of seeing their change in sexuality expression as a disrobing their straight acting fake identity after moving to Canada, it can instead be seen as the reconfiguration of their

identity that takes account of legal sanctions and available cultural models. In their home countries the illegality or cultural condemnation of their homosexual identities caused them to conceal qualities that may appear gay and only express those that appeared heterosexual. However, the legal sanctions for LGBTQ rights and cultural acceptance that they perceived in their time in Canada allowed them to reorient what qualities they presented and made prominent in their expressible sexual identities.

The fluidity of expressible identities and their official permissibility in different contexts is understandable as identification does not occur in a vacuum and requires people around a person to relate to and contrast themselves with. Britzman (1998) claims that:

> Identity is examined as a discursive effect of the social, constituted through identifications. The self becomes a problem of desiring a self and hence in need of a social. Identification allows the self-recognition and misrecognition. (p. 83)

In simpler terms, identification is a process of relation against others in a social environment where a person recognizes commonalities and differences to others that allow them to conceive of a consistent self-identity. This means that the social environment is tantamount in the process of identity making. Therefore, the international students who are relocating to different cultural contexts are interrupting that experience of relationality, and therefore their identifications are changed or effected by their new cultural surroundings. Indeed, Butler (2001) interrogates the theoretical side of this identity making and insists that it is a relational process founded upon the existence of the Other. Contemplating ideas of Cavarero, Butler claims:

> I am not, as it were, an interior subject, closed upon myself, solipsistic, posing questions of myself alone. I exist in an important sense for you, and by virtue of you. If I have lost the conditions of address, if I have no "you" to address, then I have lost "myself." In

> [Cavarero's] view, one can only tell an autobiography, one can only reference an "I" in relation to a "you": without the "you," my own story becomes impossible. (p. 24)

At the very basis of understanding one's self there requires an 'Other' person to communicate this "autobiographical" identity to, meaning that understanding and defining self-existence and self is inherently relational and connected to those around them. In this process of relational identity making, people consistently look to others to understand how they should present themselves. Indeed, Wilchins (2004) questions:

> Is all minority identity a kind of learning, anchored not just in bodies and culture but in the process of imitation and the performance of who we're supposed to be? Just as one teenager learns to act black, another learns to butch it up or act gay, while another learns to look real and pass as a woman. (p. 116)

She further explains her stance by citing the work of Beverly Tatum who makes similar points about identity construction in the realm of racial identities:

> '[T]he answer to questions such as "How should I act? What should I do" [lies with] the peer group, the kids in the cafeteria, who hold the answers to those questions. They know how to be Black. They have absorbed the stereotypical images of Black youth in the popular culture and are reflecting those images in their-self presentation.' – Beverly Tatum, *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (Wilchins, 2004, p. 115)

Wilchins and the theorist she draws on point out the impact that social identity norms can have on how one perceives and subsequently expresses their own identity. Butler (2001) confirms this again on a theoretical level as she believes that:

> There is the operation of a norm, invariably social, that conditions what will and will not be a recognizable account [of myself]. And there can be no account of myself that does not, to some extent, conform to norms that govern the humanly recognizable, or that negotiate these terms in some ways, with various risks following from that negotiation. (p. 26)

Though focusing primarily on gender, Butler (2004) again illustrates the power of such social norms that govern identity formations by pointing out the lack of control one has in this identification:

> What I call my 'own' gender appears perhaps at times as something that I author or, indeed, own. But the terms that make up one's own gender are, from the start, outside oneself, beyond oneself in a sociality that has no single author (and that radically contests the notion of authorship itself). (p. 1)

Although deconstructing gender formations, Butler's points highlight the extent that environmental and social structures influence the ways identities are shaped in their respective contexts. The experiences of the queer international students are evidence of this mutability of expressible and perceivable identities as their sexual identities shift and are in flux depending on their cultural and situational contexts. They have grappled with their various forms of identity expression in light of their placement in different social contexts with different social norms, or with different sorts of people that have diverse social norms, that govern the way their identities are expressed, perceived, or received. While this identity is comprised of characteristics they chose to present to society, this expressible identity also has a drastic effect on how the students were able to perceive their own futures and the livability and viability of a queer life in those different contexts.

5.6 Self-Planning and Perceptions of the Future

While many international students felt changes in the ways in which they could express their identities in their new Canadian university context, this also had an impact on their perceivable futures as well. The majority of the queer international students interviewed reported concerns over the implications of their sexual minority identity in regards to their future professional and romantic prospects within their home countries. As they all reported Canada to be at least slightly more accepting than their home countries in terms of LGBTQ rights, their relocation to this context changed the ways in which they perceived of and planned for what they considered a more optimistic future. Understanding the ways in which students' international journeys allow them to reconceptualize and plan their future is important within a university context as one of any universities' main goals is to prepare individuals for their future careers. The various changes in perceptions of the future that the interviewed queer international students experience are overviewed below.

As a practicing teacher in homosexuality condemning country of Jamaica, Samuel was concerned about the implications of the stereotypes of gay men as pedophiles within Jamaica and felt living in Canada would offer a better future for him. According to Samuel:

> My decision to move to Canada or to try to get an opportunity to move to Canada had to do a lot with getting away from that oppressive society because eventually I want to be able to be even more open about my sexuality. And I know if I continue to live in Jamaica particularly doing what I do – I am a teacher by profession and the perception of gay men and young boys and stuff like that… I might not be able to ever do that in my lifetime and I don't think I want to continue living like that so I had made preparations to becoming a Canadian resident but was still living in Jamaica.

In the Jamaican context where Samuel grappled with homophobia and concern over stereotypes of homosexuality and pedophilia, a mythology perpetuated by heterosexism in order to stigmatize gays and lesbians (Griffin, 1991), Samuel felt unable to be open with his sexuality. He chose to come to Canada, a legally and culturally more accepting country in his perspective, in order to be more open with his sexuality and not be hindered in his profession by his gay identity. Therefore, beyond the changes he experiences with his queer identity and its expression, he also experiences a change in his potential life path as he moved to Canada as a student. The act of relocating himself to a new cultural and legal environment effectively changed the nature of what his sexuality meant to him in the context of his future. It provides another example of the ways in which his sexual identity changes in meaning as he changes his environment.

Zachary from Guyana also experiences a change in how he perceives the impact of his gay identity on his future after moving to Canada. Zach discusses the difficulty of being openly gay in professional work life in Guyana:

> Let's say ... you're a gay person and you have a job where you deal with the public, so ... an employer mightn't have a problem employing you because you're gay, but if the customers don't like the idea, or if customers have a problem with being served by a gay person or interacting with a gay person then the employer has no other choice but to get rid of you or fire you because he has to please the customer. So ... it's difficult in that regard, you know. Even if there's people willing, there's discrimination finding jobs.

Zachary saw little hope for openly LGBTQ people to find a job in his home of Guyana. However, he had a different perception of the impact of his homosexual identity on his future in Canada. Zachary discusses how he takes comfort in the visibility of openly gay professors who are respected in their workplace at Central University in Canada:

> The fact that there is LGBT faculty and ... LGBT students, I mean, that alone for me is comforting, you know. The fact that they're there and they're functioning and interacting and respectful of each other and students are respectful of them and professors are respectful of students. That's, you know mean, that says it all. ... Because as I said in Guyana ... it's not that there aren't educated people in high office who are gay, but they're not out.

In Guyana, Zachary was unable to perceive a future in which he could be professionally successful if he were transparent with his sexual identity. However, in the Canadian university context he takes comfort from seeing successful and openly gay people around him. Indeed, Carlson (1998) points out how American universities are believed to be sites that fuel the promotion of respect and protection of rights for its LGBTQ students, especially considering the promulgation of queer studies departments in recent years. This shows that at least for Zachary and likely others, visibility of open and successful LGBT peers and professors has an impact on his comfort with his own sexual identity. Like Samuel, Zachary is more optimistic for a successful career life based upon what he has seen in Canada, ultimately changing how he views what his sexuality means for his life in this international move.

Zachary also felt that the necessity to act or pass straight in Guyana restricted his possibilities for having a successful romantic life. Zachary discusses the consequences of his straight acting life in Guyana:

> As you got older, you know mean, [passing as straight] wasn't enough anymore, you know? You wanted to have a relationship, you wanted to be open and so it got more difficult. But I had a good life. … But it was just difficult, you know. You couldn't be affectionate with some people, or you couldn't receive affection. But the older I got the

more difficult it got, because you know everyone is going on with their lives, getting married or in relationships and you're basically just stuck.

Zachary was constricted in being able to find a same sex partner in Guyana because of the necessity to act and be straight within this context. Butler (2004) theorizes situations similar to this as she claims that "sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life" (p. 1), as Zachary's straight acting normative heterosexual masculinity denied him the ability to find a romantic and professional life within Guyana. Although he does not explicitly talk about how he conceives of a romantic future in Canada, he does not face the same barrier to dating he experienced in Guyana because he does not have to act straight in Canada. In the case of Zach, the level of transparency he is able to express surrounding his sexual orientation alters the possibility of him finding a romantic partner. Butler (2004) again addresses this as she claims that "the experience of a normative restriction coming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim" (p. 1). As there is a great difference between his straight acting and gay identities that he expresses in Canada and Guyana respectively, similar to Samuel's situation in Jamaica, there is also great difference in the future he is able to build for himself within these two countries.

Mia also feels concern about her future relationships and career prospects that diminish slightly as she enters her new Canadian environment. She discusses her concern over the future in both Mexico and Canada:

I'm afraid of a bunch of stuff. Like job. I don't say [my sexuality] out loud cause I'm afraid of people seeing in a different way, or your supervisor, or you know what I mean, right? ... Cause I've heard people that [are] very mean with that sometimes.

Mia chooses not tell her colleagues at Central about her queer identity because she believes that the people she may encounter in her professional future may discriminate against her, but is otherwise okay with being transparent with her sexual orientation on the rest of the campus. She also feels concern over her potential to find romantic partnerships in general as a queer person. She discusses the negativity she felt in Mexico with potential for finding a life partner as compared to Canada:

> I'm afraid that I think it's more difficult to find a partner for life when you're gay. I see that. Well, I see it more in Mexico than in Canada. I've seen couples in Canada [who] grew up together but in Mexico all the lesbians that I know that are old [are] by themselves, alone, with cats. ... I'm just scared of that because I always like to have a family and build a life with someone.

She then explains that she feels this difficulty finding a life partner in Mexico because of what she feels are unfair laws surrounding gay marriage:

> It's gonna be difficult because, first like marriage is not even legal in my city. It's legal in Mexico City. ...If you get married in Mexico City you cannot have the rights in other cities. Like, you're married but for example things like your insurance or I don't know, like sharing the house, all the kind of stuff legal stuff, I don't think it's recognized.

The legal framework constricts Mia's ability to have a lifelong same sex union in Mexico with the same rights as a heterosexual. Her sexuality is a cause for concern for Mia within Mexico because in some places it is not legally constructed as equal to heterosexual marriages. She also reports feeling concern over her job prospects in both Canada and Mexico because of how homosexuality may be perceived. However, like Zachary and Samuel, Mia points out that she is

more optimistic about her future within Canada because of its accepting legal framework for LGBTQ people:

> I think I'm more concerned in Mexico than in Canada. I think Canada is a better environment for gay people. Like I think, like everything. I think here you can get married and you can get your rights as partners. ... I think there's homophobia in both countries but I think here legally it's a better place to live.

While she is still worried about the impact of her sexuality in both countries, like Zachary who is comforted by the success of openly visible LGBTQ people on campus, Mia is comforted by the legal framework she sees for protecting rights of LGBTQ people in Canada. In common with the other queer international students discussed above, Mia's change of environment changes the way in which she perceives the impact her sexuality will have on her future life.

Diya also feels a change in her prospects for attaining a successful relationship as she changes her cultural environment. Diya compares her feelings about dating in Qatar to how she feels in Canada:

> When I was dating someone [in Qatar] it was very, very difficult for me to be with her, and the reason we broke up was because of how difficult it would be at high school. So like, maybe here [in Canada] you have more of an opportunity to be with someone you love while there it'd still be frowned upon. Like people can get killed for that. And some people even get married to straight people and then still have that person in their life and it's really messed up, I think.

Unfortunately, the homophobic environment in which Diya attended high school precluded her from having a lasting relationship with another woman. As homosexuality is illegal in Qatar and Diya was forced to hide her sexuality, she could not perceive of a possible happy future with her

female partner and ultimately their relationship ended. However, because of the cultural acceptability of homosexuality Diya perceives in Canada, she sees the potential for successful same sex relationships in Canada. She has similar experiences as Zachary, Samuel and Mia in that the changes she experienced in legal frameworks and cultural acceptance drastically changed how she was able to perceive of and plan her romantic future.

After moving from Brazil to Canada, Paulo also felt a reconfiguration of his potential future in terms of romantic relationships. He discusses the cultural attitude of the dating scene in Brazil and compares it to Canada:

> In [my birth city] people are quite promiscuous. Yes. People have terrible problems for like, belonging to each other. ... People are more difficult to be connected to each other. Yeah. With other gay people, gay guys. They're terrible. In [my second city] I could see that people are more settled down to have the boyfriends and things. Yeah. It's more like they belong to a person. ... Here, I see that it's really like, having a family. You can adopt. You can have a job. People don't care, as long as you watch hockey together. [laughs]. But, yes, that's the main difference that I see between the cultures that I saw. ...Here [in Canada] is the way that I think it works better. Yes.

Paulo claimed that he would be able to have a romantic future in Brazil "but with difficulties". He believes Canada to be a better environment for gay people in terms of life partnerships because of laws that protect LGBTQ people's rights to have a family as well as a more family oriented cultural environment as compared to a more promiscuous gay culture in Brazil. The queer dating environment as well as the supportive legal environment in Canada appears to give him more hope than he had in Brazil to have a long term relationship with the potential to marry and adopt children. Paulo has similar experiences to the many queer international students above

whose change in environment in their international sojourns affected how they believed their futures could unfold in terms of a same-sex romantic relationship.

Identifying one's self as a queer person in different cultures drastically affects the ways in which one can perceive of possible futures with that identity. As these students understood and identified themselves as queer people within the contexts they grew up in, they are subject to different discourses on what that type of identity means for their lives within that context as well. They are aware that living life openly with a queer identity may have an impact on their futures in both countries, especially when Butler (1990) points out "not to have social recognition as an effective heterosexual is to lose one possible social identity and perhaps to gain one that is radically less sanctioned" (p. 105). However, the degree to which this social identity may or not be sanctioned is dependent upon factors such as social and cultural acceptability of LGBTQ identities as well as legal frameworks promoting and protecting LGBTQ rights, which vary from society to society. Indeed, Tierney & Dilley (1998) believe that instead of understanding identities within the context of an individual, theorists should instead look towards an "understanding of institutional and cultural practices that frame sexual orientation in a particular manner" (p. 65). According to Britzman (1998)

> One might consider culture not as a venerated, sacred object to be protected and preserved but as a highly contentious and contradictory site where discontentment and the discontented are produced, and where the geopolitics of sexuality refuse the stability of cultural, national, gendered, and sexual boundaries. (pp. 75, 76)

Here Britzman is pointing out the potential for cultures to create oppressive situations in which queer people may not fit in with established boundaries and norms. Herdt (1993) also discusses the power of context in creating normative lives:

> Historical and social formations create for cultural actors what we might call mainstreams and margins, social arenas which cultural spaces and social places define by who does what with whom and under what normative circumstances their actions are approved or disapproved. (p. 55)

It appears that culture is powerful in creating normative identities and placing value judgements on those identities. This is one way that societies influence how one will look at the chances of success of living life as an openly queer person in those contexts. This is the case for Zachary, Samuel, Mia, Diya, and Paulo who could not perceive of a successful future within their home countries where LGBTQ people were not legally and culturally supported to the same extent as in Canada, where they saw their futures more optimistically. As they relocated themselves into Canada, which had from their own reports more cultural and legal supports for LGBTQ people than their home countries, their perception of a successful future became more positive because of the differing ways in which queer identities are constructed.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed some of the identity changes that international students experienced during their time in Canada through the lens of queer theory which perceives identities as fluid and relational (Jagose, 1996). Queer theory and its stance on the relativity of constructions of sexual identities within different social contexts (Jagose, 1996; Herdt, 1993; Wilchins, 2004) also revealed how changing cultural environments may have exacerbated the international students' ever changing processes of identity formation. In particular, the chapter illuminated how the interviewed queer international students reported various elements of identity change including: changes in self-labelling as they attempted to define their sexual identities, changes in self-understanding as they re-examined their perceptions of homosexuality

and queer identities in general, changes in the construction and configuration of their own identities as they were no longer forced to straight act, situational contexts related to their home cultures that affected how they felt comfortable expressing that identity, and changes in the way they perceived of their potential future romantic and career prospects as a queer person in a new cultural context. This fits in with the literature that claims identity changes in general are a common occurrence as students undergo reflexivity in a new cultural environment and adapt to new social norms (Luzio-lockett, 1998; Kettle, 2011; Montgomery, 2010).

These findings of students experiencing identity change is significant in terms of understanding the overall experiences of international queer students on Canadian university campuses which is absent in academic literature. These findings reflect Weber's (2011) claim that "the longer students are in an unfamiliar culture, the more likely that their cognitive, affective and behavioural outlook will change" (p. 9). While there is naturally a period of adjustment in an international move, Luzio-lockett (1998) also points out the difficulty in such a process. In her study she found international students would experience a loss of self-esteem because "as a consensually shared/validated set of symbols including language)-is taken away, the whole [identity] system falls apart" (Luzio-lockett, 1998, p. 214). The international students in this study experienced such a change in culture and subsequently reformulated their identities. As identity changes such as these are quite dramatic, it is important to make sure that the university provides support to make sure that these international students are taken care of if they encounter difficulty or discontent with that change. Indeed, the importance of institutional support for these students is clear considering that queer people are commonly discriminated against.

While nearly all of the international queer students in this study reported feeling more positive about their lives as queer people within Canada, there are unfortunately still instances of discrimination against queer people that exist in the Canadian context (see Profiles). The potential for discrimination against LGBTQ people in the Canadian university context, along with the fact that the international students may be undergoing such drastic identity changes in their international study, points out the necessity of university assistance in supporting international LGBTQ students. Indeed, Tierney & Dilley (1998) point out that:

> One point for future work is to investigate how … problems intersect and diverge so that, for example, we do not essentialize oppression or assume that the process of experience of assimilation for one group is the same for another. (p. 66)

This indicates that the potentially unique set of concerns held by queer international students regarding their experiences coming to Canada should be understood and addressed by Canadian universities.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

6.1 Thesis Overview

This thesis has attempted to investigate the experiences of a select group of international queer students in one Canadian University. Although there has been a plethora of research that has found discriminatory instances of homophobic discrimination against domestic queer students present in higher education (Renn, 2010; D'Augelli, 1992; Filax & Shogan, 2004; Tierney & Dilley, 1998; Rankin, 2003; Longerbeam et al., 2007; McKinney, 2005; Beemyn, 2005), there has been little attention paid to queer international students in academic literature (Renn, 2010). Therefore, research that gives voice to this minority group is important to ensure that they are not experiencing any unaddressed instances of discrimination. It is also important as constructions and understandings of sexual minority identities can vary from culture to culture (Herdt, 1993), meaning international queer students may encounter a different experience related to their sexual minority identities than a domestic queer student may.

In order to gain a firsthand report from the participants regarding their experiences as international queer students, this thesis utilized a qualitative methodological approach with an informal interview guide. This approach was selected as appropriate for this research goal because qualitative studies are useful for gaining an in depth and detailed understanding of a particular issue or concept, and an semi-structured interview guide would keep the interviews open, informal, and participant directed (Patton, 2002). The interview data was broken down into themes that both reflected what the students felt to be important about their experiences as well as certain sensitizing concepts that were selected before the interviews started. These concepts included instances of homophobia or acceptance, success making friends, and interactions with

institutional support services on campus. In light of the interview data, the most seemingly common and important themes discussed were centred around the participants' reports of changing constructions and perceptions of their queer identities as related to their changes in cultural and political surroundings. Indeed, these identity changes experienced by the international queer students in tandem with their changed environments became the primary focus of this study and formed the basis of the data analysis chapter. The sensitizing concepts related to their perception of their old country and both Canada and their Canadian university became background context for understanding this change.

The participants' perception of the legal and cultural frameworks of Canada being more accepting of queer identities as compared to that of their home countries sheds light on the degree of change in cultural understandings of homosexuality that the students experienced. Of the seven students that participated in this study, all seven reported their experience at the Canadian university or their perception of Canada to be more accepting than their home countries. This was overwhelmingly clear for the students from Qatar, Jamaica, or Guyana whose previous countries considered homosexuality illegal and immoral (Mintz, 2013; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2007; Ireland: Refugee Documentation Centre, 2010; Itaborahy, 2012; Itaborahy & Zhu, 2013; United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2001). These students in particular also claimed that in their home countries it was difficult to live as an openly queer individual, and as such they were forced to hide their sexual minority identities while living there. The other four students came from countries with different degrees of acceptance or repression, and although in all of these countries homosexuality is legal, not all had marriage equality or positive cultural associations of queer people (Mintz, 2013; *Wikipedia* "LGBT

Rights," 2014; ILGA, n.d.b; The International Human Rights Clinic et al., 2010; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2002; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2008; Brocchetto, 2013). Regardless of these differences, and although acknowledging homophobia was present in all countries to certain degrees, all students still perceived Canada to be more accepting culturally or legally.

Ultimately, the international students' reports indicated that their international sojourn to what they perceived as a more accepting cultural and political environment incited a number of changes related to their queer identities. Some students experienced changes in self-labeling practices as they engaged with different meanings and connotations of sexual identity labels within a different cultural context. Others experienced a different perception of homosexuality and sexual minority identities as they left their home countries, which were in some ways oppressive or condemning of queer sexuality. For those students who were forced to act straight within their home countries, their reports indicated that they were engaging in processes of sexual identity reformulation in relation to new cultural and political allowances of sexual expression. Although they were able to express their sexual minority identity in their new home, some participants were still mindful of to whom they felt comfortable expressing their sexual identity. Even though they were physically removed from what they perceived as their homophobic home countries, there were still elements of their home culture in their lives, such as homophobic friends or family members. However, on a positive note, the queer international students also reported reframing their perceptions for their romantic or professional future more optimistically within what they perceived as a more accepting environment of Canada.

6.2 Significance and Implications for Further Study

The findings of this study confirmed theories already espoused in literature that relate to

the topics of sexuality or internationalization. In particular, the participants' changes in sexual identity/expression/embodiment are a testament to the socially constructed nature of gender and sexuality (Wilchins, 2004; Peterson, 1998; Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1997; Butler, 2006; Youdell, 2005). Indeed, these constructions are believed to be constructed in cooperation with social norms that can be different in culture, time, or physical space (Butler, 2004; Jagose, 1996; Wilchins, 2004). Their changes in identity were also in line with ideologies of queer theorists who believed that identity categories or roles are fluid, immutable and change with time in relation to lived experiences (Jagose, 1996; Carlson, 1998; Sumara & Davis, 1998; Kumashiro, 2002). Identities in general are reported to be formed in a relational process that is dependent upon the Other around them (Butler, 2001; Wilchins, 2004; Britzman, 1998; Pinar, 1998). The experiences of the international queer student participants is an example of these theories in practice and contributes to knowledge of the ways in which different identities can be embodied or experienced for different groups.

On a more practical note, the reports from the international queer student participants reveal more about the nature of living life as a sexual minority identity, at least for this group. All students were engaged in some degree of change or alteration of how they expressed/embodied/understood their sexual minority identities as related to the greater environmental framework in which they lived. These included a continual navigation of when they felt safe to disclose their sexuality, even across national boundaries. This experience reveals the extent to which sexual minorities are forced to continually navigate the decision of whether to share their identity in every situation they encounter (Griffin, 1991). Unfortunately, sexual minority identities remain less sanctioned than heterosexual ones that often experience discrimination (Butler, 1990; Renn, 2010; D'Augelli, 1992; Filax & Shogan, 2004; Tierney &

Dilley, 1998; Rankin, 2003; Longerbeam et al., 2007; McKinney, 2005; Beemyn, 2005). This research points out that sexual minority identities are shaped and constrained by their environmental surroundings, and their growing comfort with their sexuality in the Canadian university environment speaks to the positive effect that a legal and cultural context of acceptance can have on managing or coming to terms with sexual minority identities. This is further evidence that there is a need to continually struggle to ensure that the voices of sexual minorities are heard to ensure that environments are accepting and comfortable.

The research findings were also significant in terms of the issues discussed by the queer international students in an individual and institutional sense. The students all reported that their experiences within the Canadian university context or Canada in general were positive ones. On campus, the participants reported perceiving mutual respect between queer students and heterosexual students and faculty. Others students saw instances of official support such as Pride Week, the university pride group, and on campus queer discussion panels as contributing to this acceptance on campus and making them feel informed and welcome. Others looked at the success and respect garnered by openly queer faculty to indicate to them that a happy and well-adjusted professional future as an openly queer individual is attainable within Canada. This suggests that these moments and spaces of perceived acceptance in the participants' experiences at universities are more profound than they may appear if considered only on the surface level. Point in fact, one student reported not even attending queer themed campus events in person yet the mere knowledge that they existed comforted him. Reports such as these of the positive effects of such programming and sustained acceptance on campus is a clear indication of the importance and effectiveness of queer visibility and systematic support on campus.

As universities are gradually becoming more internationalized and the amount of international students has been rising (Welch, 2002; Williams & Johnson, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2011), there is a necessity that these universities remain knowledgeable and continually be prepared to systematically support this incoming group. While the seven queer international students interviewed felt that the university was an accepting environment, some did report mediating discrimination in their lives. While not enough to make the students feel that the Canadian university context was not accepting, there were still reports of off campus discrimination or judgment from certain peers in school. Others still felt unwelcome because of interactions with institutional staff that were not as pleasant as they had hoped. Many also found difficulty socially meeting with or merging with the queer community on campus. Although there was a great degree of approval on the university climate from the international queer student participants, these failures to completely dispel discrimination proves that the university must be relentless in its continued attempts to create a positive environment for queer international students on campus in order to protect their mental and physical well-being.

The depth of influence that the perceived acceptance on campus created for the international queer student participants in terms of their sexual minority identity suggests that there is a need for further study into institutional support on campus and its effects. This is particularly true for students who come from drastically homophobic home countries that dealt with the fear of violence before coming to Canada. Perhaps additional support related more closely to the changes in identity could be considered and made possible on campus. In this way, this research and further research of this type has the potential to inform internationalization policy in Canadian universities. If the trend continues of universities enrolling international students in such high numbers (Welch, 2002; Williams & Johnson, 2010; Guo & Chase, 2011),

there also must be adequate research that ensures that there is enough systemic supports for these international students, including its queer population.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Flyer

WANTED

Participants for Research Study

Researchers at Western's Faculty of Education are lookingfor **LGBTQ** (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, and Questioning/Queer) self-identifying **international students** to discuss their experiences on campus.

To participate you must agree to be audio recorded for a **one hour** semi-structured interview. You will be compensated with a **$10 gift card** for a coffee shop.

Please contact Elizabeth Patrick at xxxxxxxx@xxx.xx for more information.

Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx	Elizabeth Patrick xxxxxxx@xxx.xx

APPENDIX B

Letter of Information

Project Title: *Investigating the Experiences of Queer International Students*

Principal Investigator: *Wayne Martino, PhD, Education, University of Western Ontario*
Co-Investigator: *Elizabeth Patrick, Education, University of Western Ontario*

Letter of Information

Invitation to Participate

My name is Elizabeth Patrick student and I am a master's student studying Education at UWO. Along with Wayne Martino, my supervising faculty member, I am beginning research at xxxxxxx University investigating xxxxxxx'x campus climate for queer or LGBTQ international students. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your experiences and insights as a queer or LGBTQ self-identifying international student. Thoughts and experiences that you chose to share are valuable for others to come to understand what it is like for someone with a dual identity of both international and queer or LGBTQ student at a new international campus.

Purpose of the Letter

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to discover firsthand what queer or LGBTQ international students feel is relevant or important about their experiences regarding their queer or LGBTQ international student identity at xxxxxxx University. The study will ask a small number of LGBTQ or queer international students what experiences they felt were important surrounding their identities on a new campus, and whether those experiences have been negative, positive, or neutral ones in their opinion. The study is also looking to find out students felt about homophobia, social integration, differences felt between home and new country's laws and

cultures, and institutional support. The study will also utilize input from institutional support personnel who will be interviewed about their experiences aiding the campus transitions of LGBTQ international students, how they feel campus support is effective, and what they feel can be changed. The study will combine the input from both groups of international students and institutional support personnel, hoping to note deficiencies or successes in support offered and offer alternate ideas based upon interview responses. The study will both serve to propagate knowledge about the intersections of international and queer identities for queer theory as well as to provide an overview of the current climate for some queer or LGBTQ international students at xxxxxxx.

Inclusion Criteria

Those invited to participate in the study must be self-identifying queer or LGBTQ individuals and must be currently enrolled as international students at xxxxxxx.

Exclusion Criteria

The study focuses on the experience of queer international students who are experiencing a new culture or political environment by studying at xxxxxxx, and therefore those who have integrated into the Canadian education system earlier than post-secondary studies will be excluded. If you are unwilling to be audio recorded you may not take part in this study.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage in an interview with myself, Elizabeth Patrick, which will be audio recorded. It is anticipated that the interview will take one hour. The interview can occur at a quiet location of your choosing. There will be maximum of 20 participants taking part in this study.

Possible Risks and Harms

For some, gender and sexual identity can be considered a sensitive issue and as such there may be some emotional discomfort discussing possible negative experiences. It is important to note that the interview will carry on at your pace and information conveyed is completely at your discretion as a participant. While sexual and gender identities may be published, names will be changed and every effort will be made to preserve confidentiality.

Possible Benefits

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study, but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole by furthering understanding the experiences of what it is like as a queer identifying international student. Understanding the experiences of queer

international students at xxxxxxx university may be helpful in informing internationalization policy and amending institutional support services provided on campus in the future.

Compensation

You will be given a $10 coffee shop gift card at the end of the interview in appreciation of your time and participation, regardless of whether you chose to withdraw.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your future academic status.

Confidentiality

All data collected will remain confidential and accessible only to the investigators of this study. If the results are published, your name will not be used. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your data will be removed and destroyed from our database. Direct quotations from interviews may be published, but pseudonyms will be used and data collected will remain confidential. You will be provided with a copy of the interview transcript prior to publication, allowing you to request the removal or change of any information. Collected data will be stored on the researcher's personal hard drive and back up memory stick until completion of the finished study, after which the data will be deleted from the computers and stored only on the memory stick for a minimum five years according to UWO policy. This memory stick will remain in a locked desk accessible only to the researcher and data will be destroyed five years after the completion date. There will be no names or personal identifiers recorded on any of these files. Representatives of The University of Western Ontario Health Sciences Research Ethics Board may contact you or require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research

Publication

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please provide your name and contact number on a piece of paper separate from the Consent Form.

Contacts for Further Information

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, email: ethics@uwo.ca.

If you require any further information regarding this research project or your participation in the study you may contact Wayne Martino as the Principle Investigator at xxxxxxxx@xxx.xx or the Co-Investigator, Elizabeth Patrick, at xxxxxxxx@xxx.xx.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Consent Form

Project Title: Investigating the Experiences of Queer International Students

Study Investigators' Names: Wayne Martino, PhD, Education, University of Western Ontario and Elizabeth Patrick, Education, University of Western Ontario

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print): _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

Investigating the Experiences of Queer International Students
Interview Guide

Introduction

- Country of Origin
- Department and Year of Study
- Country of Origin
- Queer/LGBTQ and Gender Self-Identification

Home and New Country

- Please tell me about your decision to study abroad. Why did you decide to study in Canada?
  Probe: Are you enjoying studying abroad?
    - What were your expectations? Did you research or look anywhere to find out about what it is like for a LGBT/queer student studying in Canada? Where?
- Can you talk about what it is like for you as an LGBTQ student studying abroad?
- What did you expect it to be like as an LGBTQ/queer international student on campus?
  Probe: Has it matched your expectations?
- Have you found studying here as an LGBTQ student different in any way from your experiences back in your home country? If so, can you explain these differences?

Social Integration

- Do you feel you have made new friends on campus?
  Probe: Do you find it easy or difficult to make new friends on campus? How so?
- Have you met/made friends with any LGBTQ students on campus? What about other LGBTQ international students?
- Do they know about your LGBTQ/queer identity?
    - If so, how do you feel you conveyed that information?
- Are you comfortable with your peers and professors knowing or potentially knowing your LGBTQ/queer identity? What about in your home country?
- Are you aware of or a member of social groups for LGBTQ students at the University? What about at your university in your home country?

Campus Climate or Culture

- What is it like for LGBTQ identifying students here at the university? Do you find the campus accommodating and welcoming to LGBTQ/queer students? LGBTQ/queer international students?
- Do you feel comfortable 'being out' or people knowing about your sexual identity on campus?

- Are there any places or moments in particular where you feel or have felt either welcome or unwelcome on campus? Can you please talk about these experiences?
    - Have you ever felt uncomfortable on campus as a LGBTQ student?

Resources

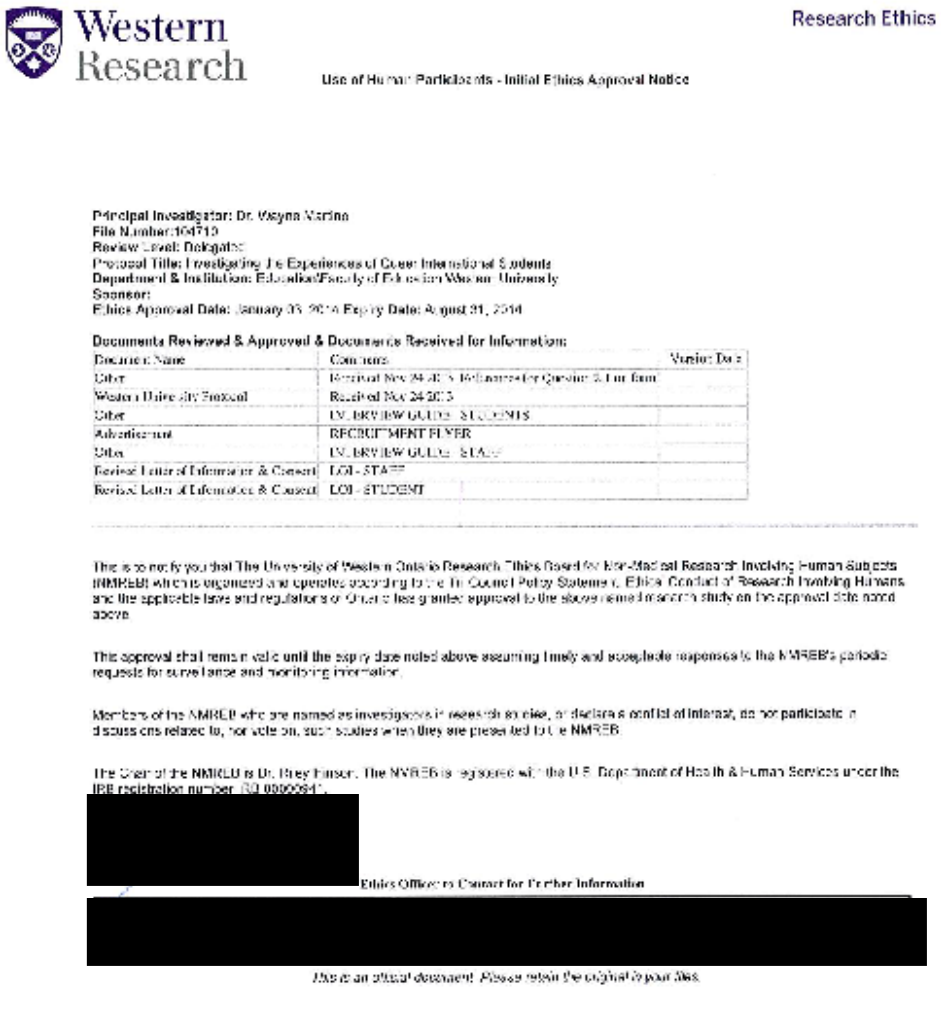
- If you encountered or were to encounter a problem relating to your LGBTQ/queer international identity on campus (i.e. homophobic comments, difficulty finding friends, etc), is there somewhere you would go to find help? Where?
- Have you ever visited organizations on campus intended for either queer/LGBTQ students or international students (i.e. Pride Library, Pride University events, The International Student Centre)? Why?
    - If so, please tell me how those visits went.
    - If so, did you find these places helpful?
- To what extent do you feel supported as an LGBTQ student on campus? Is there anything else that can be done (or other supports that are needed) to help international LGBTQ students feel safe, welcome on campus?

General Thoughts

- Is there anything in particular that stands out to you as being an important element of studying on campus as a LGBTQ/queer international student?
  Probe: Consider housing, language, customs, etc.
- What do you feel might be the same for you and what do you feel is different as an international LGBTQ/queer student on campus as opposed to a LGBTQ/queer domestic student?
- Is there anything you would like to see changed or improved on campus to make your experience as an LGBTQ/queer international student a better one?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX E

UWO Ethics Approval



Western Research

Research Ethics

Use of Human Participants - Initial Ethics Approval Notice

Principal Investigator: Dr. Wayne Martino
File Number: 104710
Review Level: Delegated
Protocol Title: Investigating the Experiences of Queer International Students
Department & Institution: Education/Faculty of Education/Western University
Sponsor:
Ethics Approval Date: January 05, 2014 Expiry Date: August 31, 2014

Documents Reviewed & Approved & Documents Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Other	Revised Nov 24 2013 Response for Question 3 Ethics form	
Western University Protocol	Received Nov 24 2013	
Other	LIST OF REVIEWED GUIDES & DOCUMENTS	
Advertisement	RECRUITMENT FLYER	
Other	LIST OF REVIEWED GUIDES & DOCUMENTS	
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	LOI - STAFF	
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	LOI - STUDENT	

This is to notify you that The University of Western Ontario Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects (NMREBI) which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the approval date noted above.

This approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the NMREBI's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

Members of the NMREBI who are named as investigators in research studies, or declare a conflict of interest, do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on, such studies when they are presented to the NMREBI.

The Chair of the NMREBI is Dr. Grey Faiser. The NMREBI is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

[redacted] Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

[redacted]

This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.

Curriculum Vitae

Name:	Elizabeth Patrick
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