

LGBT  API

A RESOURCE COMPILATION SUMMER 2014



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*\*This compilation is a result of a six-week summer graduate internship at the University of California, Riverside and is not a formal research document. All information, recommendations, and opinions presented are those expressed by contributors to this project and have been summarized and presented by the author.*

## INTRODUCTION + METHODOLOGY

The intersections of sexual, gender, and ethnic identity is at the forefront of diversity issues at colleges and universities. As practitioners in LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) student affairs, it is crucial that we understand the ethnic and racial perspectives that influence how our students actualize their own sexual and gender identities and the cultural framework by which they come to conceptualize campus resources and the community. One of the more challenging areas with LGBT student visibility and engagement is with students who also identify as API (Asian, Pacific Islander). In an attempt to identify the current state of LGBT API students and their experience, informal interviews were conducted with professional staff from eight (8) different LGBT resource centers at the following colleges and universities: Cal Poly Pomona, CSU San Marcos, Loyola Marymount University, Pomona College/Claremont Colleges, UC Davis, UC Irvine, UCLA, and UC Riverside.

The objectives for this compilation are:

- Create a shared knowledge resource for LGBT and API student service professionals
- Catalog information on programs/initiatives implemented by LGBT centers that have had impact on API students
- Increase understanding of the LGBT API student experience and how they navigate campus resources, the community at large, and their own identity development
- Connect trends to LGBT and cultural identity development theories

The information gathered focused on student programming, advocacy, student organizations, mentoring, internal and external collaborations, and challenges of current LGBT API students. Practitioners at LGBT campus centers were asked the following questions:

1. Of the LGBT student populations your program serves, what percentage would you say self-identify as API?
2. What programs or initiatives have been implemented to specifically cater to or you have found to be impactful for LGBT API students?
3. What challenges have you faced in regards to working with LGBT API students?
4. What have been your experiences with undocumented LGBT API students on your campus?
5. What kinds of collaborations (internal or external) have been instrumental in working with LGBT API students?
6. Is there a mentoring component at your LGBT program? Are API students currently serving as mentors to other students? How have API students utilized the mentoring program?
7. What recommendations would you make for current and future programs in order to provide better services and resources for LGBT API students?

## CURRENT CAMPUS LGBT API PROGRAMMING & ORGANIZING

### **Identity Specific Discussion Groups**

A few campuses have discussion series that are specifically focused to LGBT API students. For example at UC Riverside and Cal Poly Pomona, DOWNEtime is a weekly discussion only for students who identify as Asian-Pacific Islander and out/downe or questioning. This discussion usually happens in a neutral space outside of the LGBT Resource Center/Pride Center or any API related student services office. Currently, DOWNEtime is no longer active at UCR due to a strong LGBT API student organization that provides similar functions with discussion meetings.

### **Presentations from LGBT API and API Ally Speakers and Entertainers**

Some universities have brought in speakers who personally identify as LGBT API or other API individuals who have experience with an LGBT individual within their own family. These include but are not limited to:

- Marsha Aizumi (author of “Two Spirits, One Heart,” mother of trans son)
- Ryka Aoki (performer, writer, educator, trans woman of color)
- George Takei (Actor, LGBT spokesperson)
- Mia Mingus (Community educator on disability politics, reproductive freedom, transnational adoption, Queer & Korean)
- Kit Yan (Queer & Trans Asian American slam poet and musician)
- Lani Ka’ahumanu (Bi and Feminist author and activist)
- Ben de Guzman (National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance)
- Mangos with Chili members (queer & trans artists of color collective)
- All female comedy troupes focused on Lesbians in the API community
- Members of local PFLAG
- Representatives from Asian Pacific American Legal Center

### **Identity Specific Student-Run Organizations**

There are many LGBT API focused student organizations. The activity of these groups largely depends on the student leadership and often times have fallen on one or two students to keep the organizations running and determine their focus. More often these organizations focus less on activism and more on intercommunity support. Examples include Pan-Asian Queers (PAQ) at UCLA, Queer and Asian (Q&A) at UC Irvine and Pomona College, and the Queer Association of Asian and Pacific Islanders (QAAPI) at UC Riverside.

Many of these groups have a long history of not being recognized by the institution for a long time. In fact, many of their previous leadership preferred not to be a formal student organization due to concerns with visibility. For campuses that don’t have an API specific group or discussion space, students have found to be marginally engaging in Queer People of Color (QPOC) programs. On the contrary, it was also found that not all API students identify as people of color, so

this directly impacts how they organize themselves amongst their peers. This can be a reason for not getting involved with any identity-based groups.

### **LGBT API Peer Visibility**

Through various initiatives, be it student staffing or peer mentoring, an increasing numbers in LGBT API students are involved with these programs and resources. This is also more prominent at institutions that have high API enrollment. For example, at the LGBTQIA Resource Center at UC Davis, about 30-35% of their student mentors identify as API. Also at UC Davis there is an annual API Queer Visibility week event where students have expressed strong feelings of community, pride, and increased awareness.

### **Campus and Community Partnerships**

LGBT centers are tapping into other campus resources to expand student impact and share the responsibilities of time and budget with other campus partners. At LMU, the LGBT Student Services office has collaborated with the university's Ethnic and Intercultural Services to put on a variety of social and educational programs for students throughout the year. At UC Riverside, the Asian Pacific Student Programs office hosts youth based and women's conferences where the LGBT Resource Center will present or facilitate trainings. At the Claremont Colleges, the Pride Center often collaborates with the Asian American Resource Center during API Heritage Month.

### **Queer & Asian Conference [QACON] at UC Berkeley**

UC Berkeley students annually host a conference to bring together queer API people and allies. It is free and open to everyone every May. Learn more at <http://www.calqacon.org/>

## CHALLENGES + RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

### **LGBT API student visibility is not at a critical mass**

Within the contiguous United States, California has the highest enrollment percentages for API students in higher education. However, institutions do not track LGBT demographics of their students, nor is it common practice for LGBT student services to track students who identify as API. Due to issues regarding visibility and being out, it becomes difficult to track the impact of initiatives on LGBT API students.

Center staff, however, report anecdotally that LGBT API student participation and engagement increase if they can identify with API individuals who are currently part of the LGBT community on campus. Often based on assumed shared identities, this can include but not be limited to professional staff, student staff, in-center counselors, other students, program facilitators, etc.

*Recommendation:* Remain intentional and aware of the individuals interacting within community spaces. Identify key API student leaders to be advocates for center. Increase programming that features the voices of LGBT API people.

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### **Connections with API Faculty have proven successful**

With many API cultures, having an older and more experienced individuals serve as additional resources outside of the LGBT center is more beneficial. For many API students, faculty have positions of high respect and value.

*Recommendation:* Identify faculty allies who share identities with students, be it LGBT or API or both. Communicate the expectations of faculty allies and connect students appropriately. Establish a mentorship role with faculty if time and resources permit.

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### **Neutral spaces lessens fear of visibility**

LGBT API students will often feel conflicted and end up having a greater affinity for their own ethnic and racial identity over their sexual and gender identities. This can become a boundary when interacting with the LGBT campus community.

*Recommendation:* Try programming for LGBT API students outside of an LGBT or API designated space. The neutrality of the space is less of a physical deterrent for students who may not feel comfortable entering a specific space. The space should still be private (i.e. classroom).

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## **Family Expectations of Proper Gender Roles Impact API Students' Gender Expression and Identity**

API students report experiencing wide variations with expectations of gender expression within campus life and their life at home. Female-bodied students, in particular, report stress regarding their inability to maintain more fluid or non-feminine gender expression when with family. Students with diverse gender identities report this stress.

*Recommendation:* Increase conversations regarding gender expression and identity in both formal and informal student discussion spaces. Encourage student organizations to create dialogues regarding family issues and gender expression.

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## **LGBT API Issues Get Lost in the Larger Conversation**

Within the designation of API, there are many customs that conceptualize gender and sexuality in many different ways. The level of how a student's family reflects these customs can vary. Secondary to that, contemporary models of LGBT identity development do not account for API-specific factors.

At institutions where API enrollment isn't typically high, the cultural implications of LGBT API students often get lost in the larger conversation of LGBT ethnic minority groups as a whole and more often are less prevalent than conversations regarding services for larger marginalized groups (i.e. Black or Latino students). Assumptions are made about the social realities of LGBT API students and institutional resources end up being too general.

*Recommendation:* For the API students that are on your campus, program toward increasing the understanding of the cultural perspectives that each ethnic group may have regarding gender and sexuality. For example understanding gender within Chinese communities is very different from Filipino communities. Here are some initial questions to help better improve competency within any particular cultural group:

- What are the expectations of gender?
  - What are the perceptions of sexual wellness?
  - What is the student's family history with other LGBT individuals?
  - What are varying levels of visibility and "outness," especially at home in comparison to being on campus?
  - What is the culture of dependence--both for the student and for the student's family?
  - What does ally-ship look like within a particular community? Are there any unspoken expectations about being an ally?
  - Among the students with similar ethnic identities, are there differences in circumstances for international versus domestic students when exploring gender and sexuality?
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### **Intersections of Identity Merit Intersections of Resources**

Too often, especially on larger campuses, institutional resources tend to operate within silos and collaboration happens sparingly throughout the academic year. It is vital that LGBT centers collaborate often with services and organizations that are in support of the API community.

*Recommendation:* Seek out collaborations with API support offices, academic programs, faculty, and student organizations around campus to do active and passive programming. Facilitate these programs earlier in the academic year, so students can better identify the working relationship and establish a culture of expectation around programs regarding intersections.

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### **Low-Risk Mentoring is Helpful for LGBT API students**

With the concern of visibility, API students have found it beneficial to engage in dialogue about LGBT concerns in an environment that is physically less visible but still interpersonal.

*Recommendation:* If not done so already, establish an online peer-to-peer connections program where students can interact in a safe-environment. If possible, have API students serve as the mentors who engage in dialogue with students. For more information on the structure of this type of program, visit the LGBTQArchitect web site at <http://architect.ucr.edu> and search for *Peer Connections*.

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### **Programming Coincides with Commemorative Timelines**

Many institutions are programming around commemorative weeks or months (i.e. “Trans-Awareness Week” or “API Heritage Month”) and this is very beneficial in providing a concentrated awareness across campus, and tend to include large-scale events. However, such programming uses a lot of resources and often limits the programming possibilities for the remainder of the year.

*Recommendation:* Spread it out. Using a consistent voice throughout the academic year can provide more visibility for students who may be struggling with certain issues. For example, host queer-API speakers throughout the Fall semester in addition to the programs included in Asian Pacific Heritage Month in May.

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### **Undocumented LGBT API Student Visibility is Low**

Consistent with the visibility concerns of undocumented college students in general, LGBT API students are experiencing similar challenges in disclosure. There is a common acknowledgement that undocumented LGBT API students exist on campus, along with an inability to identify who those students are and

whether or not they have been utilizing LGBT resources. Often, campus visibility regarding undocumented students centers around Latino/a or Chicano/a undocumented students.

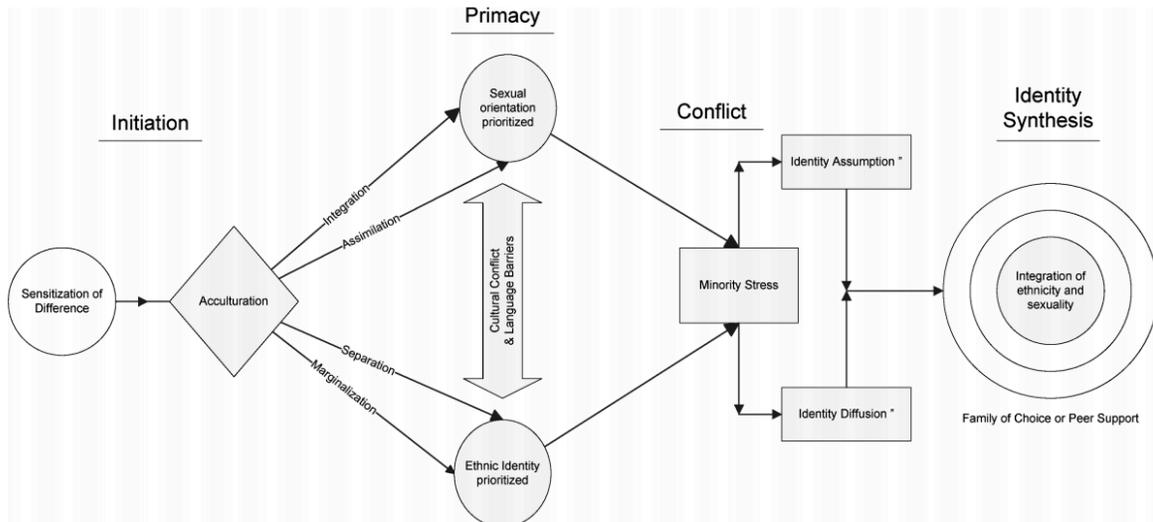
*Recommendation:* Identify the offices and individuals on campus who have had greater visibility in dealing with undocumented students and their concerns. Implement some collaborative programming to begin building a safe-culture around these issues. If doing an active program, start by utilizing a more neutral space. Bring in speakers, screen films, or otherwise program regarding the undocumented LGBT API experience.

## SUPPORTING LITERATURE & THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Within the API community at-large, topics around LGBT issues and identity are still often unspoken and unaddressed. For API students, a campus culture that is less marginalizing will better facilitate their actualization of their sexual and gender identities. Many perspectives on the intersections of college student identities exist. This section is a brief outline of existing literature and identity development theory that support the themes and trends presented in this compilation:

### *API Sexual Minority Acculturation Model*

Using Berry's acculturation model, Troiden's homosexual identity formation model and Meyer's Minority Stress Model, Hahm and Adkins (2009) present us the API Sexual Minority Acculturation Model. The model illustrates the experience of API individuals who identify as LGBT while taking into consideration the social, cultural, and familial experiences that distinguish them from the majority LGBT community. The model also presents the psychological stress that may also be different from individuals in the white mainstream. Though technically a stage model, a person has the ability to assume different acculturation strategies during a lifetime (Hahm & Adkins, 2009).



### *Students Conceptualizing their Intersections of Identity*

Upon entry into higher education, very few students understand how a university comprehends sexual, gender, and ethnic diversity. This can provide some difficulty in navigating the resources available to them and the community that exists within the institution. For those going through the “coming out” process in

college, this is a starting point. Many API students already come to college with a stronger sense of racial and ethnic identity over gender and sexuality (largely due to family influence). The challenge here is that depending on how and when multiple identities intersect, a student's development in any identity can either regress or progress. The idea is that students with multiple identities develop not in linear stages, but as a complex process of simultaneous tasks and challenges (Poynter & Washington, 2005).

### *Familial Pressures & Lack of Representations Within Institution*

Perhaps the most important factor that influences an API college student's experience is the expectations placed on them by their family. Culturally, LGBT topics are still considered relatively taboo within API households and, for students who identify as LGBT, there is often a fear of shame or dismissal from their family. The role of the student within their family, their commitment to self-sacrifice for the betterment of their community, and other external social factors can heavily determine whether or not API students are able to have a positive sexual identity (Berry, 2001).

As a trend previously stated, it is vital for API students to see themselves reflected among professional staff at the institution. Across the country, API professional presence is still significantly lower than any other ethnic group. According to a survey of higher education in 2005, only 5,493 executive, administrative, and managerial API staff worked in higher education (Teranishi, Behringer, Grey, & Parker, 2009). Based on these numbers, it is a safe assumption that the number of API LGBT professional staff is much lower.

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Pomona College/Claremont Colleges – Queer Resource Center

University of California, Davis - LGBTQIA Resource Center

University of California, Irvine - LGBT Resource Center

University of California, Los Angeles - LGBT Campus Resource Center

University of California, Riverside - LGBT Resource Center

## RESOURCES

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