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# The Lived Experiences of Gender and Sexually Diverse Students at the University of Calgary

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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

The Lived Experiences of Gender and Sexually Diverse Students at the University of Calgary

by

Cong Luo

A THESIS

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## Abstract

Postsecondary institutions have traditionally served as havens for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex (2SLGBTQI+) students. The University of Calgary (UCalgary) espouses allyship and commitment to diversity on its official website and policy, “UCalgary values and champions diversity, equality and inclusiveness.” However, no research has investigated the well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ students at UCalgary. This study seeks to delve into the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at UCalgary, treating them as experts in their own experiences, and advocating for positive changes. This study intends to serve as a useful resource for UCalgary and other higher education stakeholders by providing insights into the opportunities and challenges facing 2SLGBTQI+ students, and solutions to address the issues. By adopting a mixed methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative elements, this research gathered and analyzed 64 survey responses to identify gaps in university services, resources, and programs impacting 2SLGBTQI+ students’ campus experiences. Additionally, I conducted 18 open-ended and semi-structured interviews to explore participants’ perceptions of inclusivity on campus. The findings suggest that UCalgary’s overall performance is satisfactory while pointing to disparities among 2SLGBTQI+ students, with some thriving socially and academically while others encounter barriers and struggles. Despite rare instances of overt transphobic or homophobic abuse, microaggressions and subtle forms of discrimination persist within and outside of classrooms. Gender and sexually diverse students express a desire for UCalgary to enhance its policies and practices to support their community, fostering a safer and more inclusive learning and teaching environment for all.

*Keywords:* queer students, higher education, mixed methods, inclusivity, UCalgary

## **Preface**

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by C. Luo. The results reported in Chapter 4 were covered by Ethics Certificate number REB21-1214, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) for the project “The Lived Experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ Students at the University of Calgary” on September 14, 2021.

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research study to my beloved grandmother, Junlian Wang, who passed away in 2021. She taught me about some of the untold and hidden histories of China, shaping my identity as a believer, defender, and fighter for human rights. My dearest grandmother, I know you have never left me, you have been there to support me, offering me warmth, strength, and love when life is hard. I miss you and you will always be living in my heart.

I also want to express my heartfelt appreciation to all my research participants in the 2SLGBTQI+ community at UCalgary. Thank you so much for entrusting me and allowing me to enter your fascinating yet vulnerable world. It was a great honour to hear your invaluable insights and unique stories.

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## Chapter One—Introduction

They all say “it gets better” once you graduate from high school as if the university would be a haven for 2SLGBTQI+<sup>1</sup> students. This statement holds some truths. Post-secondary institutions have historically been, and remain, ideal environments for students to further develop their identities (Renn, 2017). After all, the ivory tower is viewed as an open and liberal world. The “let live” attitude seems to be prevalent on campus, and you will be “tolerated” so long as you do not flaunt your ‘rainbow pride’. Nevertheless, one is not supposed to demand more or have further expectations. Not long after I participated in the Calgary Pride parade with the Werklund School of Education team, I was wandering around at MacEwan Hall Student Centre and was attracted by the rainbow pride colours of the Q Center. I walked inside hoping to be greeted by a friendly smile, but that did not happen. In fact, at reception, I did not even receive a pleasant greeting or any form of welcome. The indifferent facial expression of the reception staff irritated me. Thus, my first impression of the Q Centre was not good at all. Apparently, this goes against its description on its website that the “Q Centre is a safe, comfortable, and inviting space for the LGBTQA+ community at the University of Calgary” (UCalgary Students’ Union, n.d). Unfortunately, this seems to reflect the predicament 2SLGBTQI+ students find themselves in, where many gay male students stay in the closet; bisexuals are almost invisible; lesbian voices have always been silenced; and transgender folks are extremely marginalized. To a degree, this fact has reflected the current social climate in Alberta since the United Conservative Party (UCP) took power in 2019. The precursor to the UCP, Alberta’s former Wild Rose Party, was

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<sup>1</sup> Language related to gender and sexual diversity varies and is ever evolving. Throughout this thesis, the phrase “gender and sexually diverse” and the acronym 2SLGBTQI+ are used to denote individuals who do not identify or conform with norms of sex and gender as they relate to sexual orientation, relationship status, gender identity and intersex status. Please see the overview of terminology used in this thesis on page 8 for further details.

notoriously known for its hostile stance against the 2SLGBTQI+ community. The current provincial government under UCP leadership has a disturbing track record in terms of 2SLGBTQI+ issues (Hamilton et al., 2023). To name a few, John Carpay, a UCP member, referred rainbow pride flag as Nazi Swastika, and he was also challenging Alberta's law on gay-straight alliances that bans schools from informing parents of their children's participation (Loriggio, 2018); Another UCP MLA in Red Deer, Jennifer Johnson, made extremely transphobic remarks comparing transgender children to "feces" (Swensrude, 2023); The current Albertan premier and UCP leader, Danielle Smith, announced a series of policy changes hurting the 2SLGBTQI+ community from use of gender pronouns to restrictions on gender-affirming healthcare (Strasser, 2024). Even though the University of Calgary endorses building a diverse and inclusive campus, it is questionable if this unfriendly top-down atmosphere would negatively impact UCalgary's operation and administration concerning the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

The purpose of this research project is to gain a better and deeper understanding of the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at the University of Calgary. The assumption I bring to this topic is that 2SLGBTQI+ students would encounter difficulties and challenges in terms of curriculum, mental and physical health, academic and career support, and the lack of access to facilities and services that cater to 2SLGBTQI+ on campus. This study was undertaken with a student-centred lens within a mixed methods framework. It was designed to generate knowledge that could inform advocacy, policymaking, and discussions while treating participants as experts in the subject matter. The goal of this research is to serve as a useful resource for university stakeholders, including administrators, policymakers, faculties, and campus-based 2SLGBTQI+ groups by providing insights into the perceived challenges facing 2SLGBTQI+ students, and by identifying solutions that reflect the input of the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

I was on a Christmas retreat trip with a group of UCalgary students. “What is your research topic?” asked a person who was sitting right next to me at the dinner table. That was an eternally troubling question for me—to lie or to tell the truth. No matter how much I wanted to give that person an honest answer, my self-protection mechanism, built from past life experiences, stopped my impulse to tell the truth. Admittedly, I hold a lot of biases and assumptions about straight men’s attitudes towards 2SLGBTQI+ people. Compared with their heterosexual counterparts, heterosexual men were more likely to view gay male relationships as revolting (Louiderback & Whitley, 1997; Renaud & Byers, 2001) and they were more extreme towards homosexuals, particularly gay men (Moskowitz et al., 2010). I answered without any hesitation, “Multilingual education among immigrant children in Canada,” which was indeed my previous research topic. It is an easy and safer option that avoids any potential confrontations. I was hoping to end this conversation that made me uneasy, but the nightmare continued. People began to show their interest and asked me follow-up questions that I was not prepared for. I quickly searched all the previous literature I had read that was still alive in my brain and tried my best to respond to their genuinely curious questions. Eventually, I threw the ball back to that person’s court by saying, “Now it is your turn to talk about your research study.” Interestingly, this story was to be continued...

Life could be so karmic at times. I was serving as a speaker to talk about the importance of creating a more inclusive space for 2SLGBTQI+ students at the University of Calgary. The event was featured in the newsletter of the GSA. As more attendees joined the Zoom, a familiar name drew my attention, and it was another guy who was sitting right across the table at that time. He stayed until the end of my talk, and I felt very embarrassed about the circumstances. There was a voice lingering in my mind, “He must have known I was lying to all of them, and he

probably also guessed I am gay.” Fortunately, this story came to a happy ending and our friendship grew after this. We decided to meet up for a meal together and he said to me, “I understand, and I don’t blame you for that. There’s still so much intolerance in this world, but did I really give you a redneck impression?” We both burst into laughter while enjoying the beer. As much as I take pride in conducting my research and I am almost completely open about my sexuality to people on campus, I still lie about my actual research study because I was still worried about people’s negative reactions and dealing with unpleasant situations. It can be difficult to predict people’s real attitudes towards 2SLGBTQI+ people, and the harsh reality may hide well beneath those fake smiles.

Most people hold a positive view of higher education and tend to perceive the university as a safer space than the rest of society (DeWitt, 2012). Perceptions of the university being a “safer” place than elsewhere clearly suggest that people have negative perceptions about their safety in the larger society. I still remember how the two terms “gender” and “sexuality” on my T-shirt caused an unpleasant dispute with a close family member of mine. She said, “Have you got any idea about what people really think of those (2SLGBTQI+) people?” This comment woke me up from an unrealistic dream at that moment. I gradually came to realize that I live in this beautiful yet delusional bubble at the university, outside of which inclusivity stays only at the surface level. Although I rarely hear of any extremely homo/transphobic incidents at the university, verbal abuse, and physical harassment still occur occasionally, which was confirmed by my own experiences attending several 2SLGBTQI+- themed events held on campus, as well as from conversations I had with 2SLGBTQI+ students. Based on my observation, there were issues and obstacles 2SLGBTQI+ students may experience on campus. Moreover, it was evident in survey responses and dialogues with my research participants that there are a lot of

assumptions about gender and sexuality. Heteronormativity and cisgenderism are so dominant that people would assume everyone is straight and cisgender. I contend that higher educational institutions play a critical role in advancing social justice. To counter the destructive impact of heteronormativity and create more inclusive and equitable environments, educators, policymakers, and activists are obligated to interrogate and address heteronormativity in their practices by understanding privileges and systemic oppression (Steck & Perry, 2018; Yep, 2002).

There are currently more than thirty-seven thousand students at the University of Calgary. Given that 2SLGBTQI+ people usually amount to 4%-10% of the general population (Statistics Canada, 2022; Ipsos, 2021). It can be estimated that there are somewhere between 1500 and 3700 2SLGBTQI+ students, who account for a large student body. As an international queer graduate student of colour who is currently studying at the University of Calgary, I think that the learning and teaching environment is open, encouraging, and friendly, at least within the Werklund School of Education. Most of my classmates and instructors have been respectful, understanding, and supportive. However, my perspective is only based on my experience and cannot claim to represent the experiences of other 2SLGBTQI+ students, nor can it be generalized across the entire university.

While the literature specializing in 2SLGBTQI+ students in the postsecondary context is relatively small, Canadian scholars have examined a wide range of issues in terms of attitudes, curricula, queer centres, policies, programs, and resources, and campus and classroom climate (Dentato et al., 2016; Ecker et al., 2015; Jewell & Morrison, 2010; Schellenberg et al., 1999; Schenk Martin & González, 2020; Woodford et al., 2019). Their research shed light on the emerging needs and urgency to challenge status-quo and investigate the well-being and university experiences of this minoritized and marginalized population. Therefore, it is of great



significance to explore 2SLGBTQI+ students' lived experiences at the University of Calgary and evaluate UCalgary's queer friendliness.

I am a member of the 2SLGBTQI+ community myself, also volunteered for the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA2). In our committee meetings, I heard so many outrageous stories about how 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus were being treated like “abandoned babies”, surviving on their own. I could feel people's anger, frustration, and disappointment. One of the biggest issues queer groups must deal with was *bureaucracy*. The University of Calgary is not only failing its 2SLGBTQI+ students but also those who have been working tirelessly to promote diversity. How could people just pretend that everything is fine!? I refused to give in to the rhetoric that the university is the perfect shelter for 2SLGBTQI+ students. I was determined to explore the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students and investigate what needs to be done to better support gender and sexually diverse students. I was hoping my study could inform effective actions and measures, and most importantly, bring positive changes to the campus.

### **The UCalgary 2SLGBTQI+ Landscape**

There are a few groups on campus for the 2SLGBTQI+ community. The most widely known is the Q Centre, a “safe, comfortable and inviting space for the campus LGBTQ+ community, featuring a library and peer support services.” (UCalgary Students' Union, n.d.) Currently, it is the only physical space at the University of Calgary designated for gender and sexually diverse students. The majority of its clientele are undergraduate students. Additionally, the Queers on Campus (QOC) Club is made up of “queer people and allies working together to encourage and promote understanding and acceptance within the greater university community” (UCalgary, n.d.) It focuses mainly on areas of education, political action, and social events. Its club website says, “We operate under a non-judgmental and sex-positive framework to build a

strong and engaged network of queer people and allies on campus.” (UCalgary Students’ Union, n.d.). It has an active official channel on Discord (a popular anonymous instant messaging platform), used for real-time communication among UCalgary 2SLGBTQI+ students. For graduate students, there is the GSA2, a subcommittee of the UCalgary Graduate Student Association (GSA). It strives to increase the visibility of gender and sexual minorities and create a safe, respectful, and inclusive campus. Moreover, the UCalgary 2SLGBTQI+ residence community formed a student-run organization—The Residence Rainbow Council which “fosters a safe, loving, and inclusive space for all.” (UCalgary, n.d.) The goal is to “provide LGBTQ+ programs, events, advocacy, education, and outreach for all UCalgary residences.” (UCalgary, n.d.).

In addition to student-led groups, the UCalgary Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion works to build an inclusive and safe campus. It developed the LGBT2S+ Guide that provides information on resources, opportunities, services, and support programs for the UCalgary community. The aim is to “create equitable pathways by providing educational resources and supports for all, and by championing gender inclusivity and sexual diversity at UCalgary and the broader community.” (UCalgary, n.d.) Although not specifically for 2SLGBTQI+ students, the Women’s Resources Centre (WRC) and the Faith and Spirituality Centre (FSC) are safe, welcoming, and inclusive on-campus spaces for gender and sexually diverse individuals. I have been impressed by their affirming practices and I visit them regularly to study and socialize. Some of my interview participants also confirmed my positive experiences as a queer student with these two centres.

While the University of Calgary has been trying to fulfill its commitment to creating a more diverse and inclusive campus through its official policies and regulations, there are still

some gaps and inconsistencies across different domains. As a result, some of the specific needs of 2SLGBTQI+ students have either been overlooked or not been met. An emerging demonstration of this is that there is no mandate in the current regulations and policies requiring instructors to adopt inclusive language instruction such as using proper gender pronouns and correct students' names. All my research participants spoke on the significance of feeling included and respected in the classroom. They were calling on the university to further enhance its practices and hold students and professors accountable for harming 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

The University of Calgary revised its UCalgary News Style Guide, a reference tool for those who write on behalf of the university for widely read publications (University Relations Staff, 2019). Adjustments and updates were made to the inclusive language section about gender and sexual diversity, in particular. "The university is uniquely positioned as a leading institution to help define and encourage the use of inclusive language", said David Hedley, UToday managing editor. Furthermore, the University of Calgary clearly included sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression in its Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Policy. The definition is outlined as "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence means.....by targeting an individual because of their sex, gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation" (UCalgary, 2022). The correspondent UCalgary Sexual Violence Support Team connects individuals who have been impacted by sexual and gender-based violence with relevant services, "inform you of your rights, talk through your options or just listen", as stated on its official page. Most recently, the University of Calgary issued a statement (UCalgary, 2023) in response to the escalating threats and protests disturbing the LGBTQ2S+ community in Calgary (Tran, 2023; Trembath, 2023). The university showed its stance by stating,

The University of Calgary recognizes the importance of pluralism and is dedicated to creating a respectful and safe environment for gender-diverse, culturally diverse, and intersex members of our campus and in the community, the University of Calgary denounces the hate speech and violence recently seen in our city.

Dimensions: equity, diversity, and inclusion Canada is a federal initiative that invites postsecondary institutions to participate in a transformation to “increase equity, diversity, and inclusion and help drive deeper cultural change within the research ecosystem by identifying and eliminating obstacles and inequities” (Natural Science and Engineering Research Council of Canada; Canadian Institutes of Health Research; Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, n.d.). The University of Calgary endorsed the charter of Dimensions and was selected to be part of the Dimensions pilot program that “takes a multidimensional approach to equity, diversity, and inclusion to achieve a future research community where all can thrive.” (UCalgary, n.d.) This move demonstrated UCalgary’s dedication to taking more active roles in achieving equity, diversity, and inclusion within its territory.

### **Terminology for Gender and Sexual Diversity**

2SLGBTQI+ labels and terminology are a contentious social issue, with the need for inclusiveness, and respect for the different wishes of the people labeled (Hall et al., 2019). Thelwall et al. (2022) suggested that academics need to adjust to changes in societal language and utilize precise and appropriate words. Over the past century, there has been a considerable evolution in 2SLGBTQI+ terminology, including changed meanings for individual terms and the introduction of new concepts (Ferris, 2006). For example, 2SLGBTQI+ has been more broadly adopted in the Canadian context. This acronym stands for Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and all other people who identify as part of sexually and gender

diverse communities (Government Canada, 2023). Two-Spirit encompasses concepts traditional to various Indigenous cultures, referring to a culturally specific identity, which is utilized by some Indigenous people to describe an individual whose gender identity, spiritual identity, and/or sexual orientation embody both male and female spirits (Government Canada, 2022). I acknowledge that there are other acronyms to represent gender and sexually diverse people and that gender and sexual minorities may have different preferences for these acronyms. In my thesis, I decided to use “2SLGBTQI+” to refer to gender and sexual minorities in the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation (Government Canada, 2024). Gender terminology has also been evolving particularly rapidly in recent years, with non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, and gender diverse more common (Thorne et al, 2019). It is worth noting that many participants in my research identify themselves with more than one gender identity and/or sexual orientation. In the literature and findings chapters, I chose to respect and keep the researchers’ and participants’ original wording for gender and sexually diverse people.

A horrifying stabbing attack took place right in the middle of a gender studies class at the University of Waterloo and shocked the entire community. What is even more disturbing is that the investigators believe it was hate-motivated and related to gender expression and gender identity (CTV News, 2023). This incident is a cruel reminder that post-secondary institutions are not immune to hatred against gender and sexually minoritized people. Two Waterloo professors stressed the need to name online and offline violence against women, racialized, disabled, queer, and gender nonconforming people as stochastic terrorism, defined as public demonization of a group and inciting random violence against that group (MacDonald & Kolentis, 2023). They argued that universities are sites of risk where we challenge our fundamental assumptions by inviting new perspectives and that classrooms can become sites of transformation and liberation.

In response to such hate and intolerance, Connor (2023) warned that postsecondary institutions must stay vigilant and continue their commitments to supporting the LGBTQ2S+ community, otherwise, the kind of attack will happen again if actions are not being taken right now.

My thesis presents the campus climate, opportunities, and challenges facing 2SLGBTI+ students. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature focusing on 2SLGBTQI+ students in Higher Education. In Chapter 3, I explained why I chose mixed methods as my research approach, detailing how it allowed for comprehensive research. Chapter 4 reports the survey and interview data, painting a vivid picture of the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at UCalgary. Finally, the last chapter offers directions for future research and recommendations for the University of Calgary to better support gender and sexually diverse students and to create a safer, more inclusive, and more diverse learning and teaching environment.

## **Chapter Two—Literature Review**

The literature on 2SLGBTQI+ experiences in Higher Education is small but shows a somewhat similar trend in its focus on experiences of discrimination, prejudice, and bullying on campus. In the United States in particular, a focus on “Campus Climate”, defined by Rankin (2005) as “the cumulative attitudes, behaviors, and standards of employees and students concerning access for inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities, and potential” (p. 27), tends to emphasize negative experiences. For instance, Valentine et al. (2009) reported that homophobic discrimination or bullying occurred for 20% of LGB students outside of their courses. Similarly, 29% of trans students had taken time out due to trans-related issues, transphobic bullying, or harassment (Valentine et al., 2009). However, a recent study highlights the aspects of academic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal thriving, and suggested that thriving for college LGBTQ+ students can arise in various ways (Hill et al., 2020). Therefore, it is imperative to further explore the 2SLGBTQI+ people’s lives in the Higher Education context.

### **Gender and Sexual Diversity and the 2SLGBTQI+ Family**

Gender and sexual minority lives and identities have been evolving over time. New identity terms have emerged to reflect lived experiences that had been unnamed or overlooked as more people feel comfortable challenging the historical binaries of sexuality (heterosexual or homosexual) and gender (male/female) (Russel et al., 2023). By challenging boundaries, queer perspectives also blur the distinction between gender and sexuality. For instance, a genderqueer identity is at the intersection of queer gender and sexuality for some people and does not represent a singular identity for those who identify as genderqueer (Barsigian et al., 2020). Furthermore, queer perspectives question limited binary definitions that have historically determined other identities (e.g. race, ethnicity, social class, or religion) that constitute the self

(Gamson & Moon, 2004). For example, “Gaysian” is a contemporary term that highlights the identity of being both Asian and LGBTQ+ (Austin, 2016; Eguchi, 2020). The concepts of LGBTQ+ are evolving to include new and additional labels that depict sexuality as an integral part of diverse personal and social identities (Russel et al., 2023).

The term 2SLGBTQI+ stands for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning, and the plus sign (+) acknowledges the inclusion of other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. This acronym represents an inclusive spectrum of identities, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and respecting the diversity within the community. Two-Spirit is a term used by some Indigenous North American cultures to describe individuals who embody both masculine and feminine qualities or whose gender identity, sexual orientation, or spiritual identity encompasses both male and female identities (Wilson, 1996). As Wilson (1996) noted, in many Indigenous cultures, Two-spirit individuals were historically held in high esteem and often assumed important roles such as healers, mediators, and caregivers. Therefore, the inclusion of Two-Spirit is particularly significant as it honours the unique cultural and spiritual identities of Indigenous peoples. Driskill et al. (2011) argued that this inclusive terminology underscores the importance of acknowledging the varied and intersecting identities that people hold, promoting a more comprehensive and respectful dialogue about gender and sexuality.

### **Canadian Context**

The history of civil rights in Canada shows an increasing governmental effort to address the physical, emotional, mental, legal, and financial needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender citizens (Bellini, 2012). The research on 2SLGBTQI+ students has mostly focused on the K-12 school systems. The first national school climate survey in Canada revealed that



homophobic and transphobic bullying was prevalent and led to 75% of LGB students and 95% of transgender students feeling unsafe at school (Taylor, 2009). Notably, Callaghan (2012, 2018) investigated religiously inspired intolerance toward non-heterosexuals in Canadian Catholic schools, the findings indicated that there was a persistent hostile climate and systemic discrimination against LGBTQ people. Despite various policies and initiatives, gay and lesbian students still report experiencing homophobia and a general lack of emotional support from K-12 educators and administrators (Bellini, 2012).

The literature on 2SLGBTQI+ students in Higher Education in Canada is limited, but scholars have explored different topics and fields. Schellenberg et al. (1999) investigated attitudes toward homosexuals among students at a Canadian University, the results indicated that more negative attitudes were directed to gay men compared to lesbians, but attitudes improved with time spent at the university. Jewell and Morrison (2010) examined antigay attitudes and behaviours at a university in Western Canada. The results suggested that participants engaged in various blatant antigay behaviours including disrespectful comments, playing jokes, warning distance, and verbal and physical threats. Dentato et al. (2016) found that while many social work programs provide affirming and supportive environments for LGBTQ students, heteronormative and heterosexist discourse dominates the classroom settings. The authors argued that there is an urgency to create a safe and inviting classroom climate in social work education. Schenk Martin and González (2020) examined the availability and accessibility of resources for LGBTQ+ students in Ontario universities, the findings suggested that there were limited external and internal resources and a lack of multiple identity approaches. Ecker et al. (2015) conducted a national survey of queer student centers (QSC) in Canadian Colleges and universities, and they suggest that post-secondary administrators and policymakers need to support QSC's operation

and acknowledge the needs and experiences of queer students. The authors suggested that QSCs provide education, support, resources, awareness, and networking opportunities for queer students for both open and closeted queer students. Woodford et al. (2015) found that gaps still exist in terms of LGBTQI+ policies, resources, and services in Canada.

A national study (Statistics Canada, 2020) explored students' experiences of discrimination based on gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation at postsecondary schools in the Canadian provinces. The findings illustrate a harsh reality, particularly for the 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. More specifically, one-third of LGB+ students experienced discrimination on gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation can have various detrimental impacts on people who experience it. The study also investigated how students' experiences of discrimination had affected their emotional and mental well-being and academic life. Notably, almost all types of negative impacts on emotional and mental health were more prevalent among LGB+ students, compared to their non-LGB+ counterparts, particularly when it came to serious impacts on mental well-being. In addition, transgender students were considerably more likely to have experienced discrimination than cisgender students. Specifically, 40% of transgender students were subject to discrimination. 22% faced insults, mistreatment, exclusion, or being ignored because they were, or were assumed to be, transgender. Even though discrimination may negatively impact these students' overall well-being in many aspects, relatively few students thought that experiences of discrimination influenced their academic life. Another disturbing fact is that less than a tenth of students who experienced discrimination speak about it with someone associated with the school. I believe that it is worthwhile to examine whether this trend is similar in the Ucalgary context.

## **Canadian Commitment**

Canada has demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting the human rights of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals at the federal level. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, enacted in 1982, is a cornerstone document that guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all Canadians. Specifically, Section 15 of the Charter ensures equality before and under the law without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. Over the years, Canadian courts have interpreted "sex" to include sexual orientation and gender identity, thereby extending these protections to 2SLGBTQI+ individuals (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2021). In a landmark decision, Canada progressively achieved marriage equality in 2005, becoming the fourth country in the world, and the first country outside Europe, to legally recognize same-sex couples throughout its borders (Eichler, 2021). The Civil Marriage Act, which received Royal Assent on July 20, 2005, defines marriage as "the lawful union of two persons to the exclusion of all others" (Department of Justice Canada, 2005). This significant legal reform underscored Canada's commitment to ensuring equal rights and recognition for same-sex partners.

By 2017, legal protections for gender identity and/or gender expression had been systematized in human rights legislation across all provinces and territories in Canada. These protections are vital in promoting inclusivity and safeguarding the rights of gender-diverse individuals. Additionally, in 2015, the Alberta Human Rights Commission administered the Alberta Human Rights Act, which explicitly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. According to the Act, these protections are essential to fostering a fair and equitable society for all Albertans (Alberta Human Rights Commission, 2023).

On August 28, 2022, the Government of Canada launched the 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan that seeks to advance rights and equality for 2SLGBTQI+ people in Canada. This Action Plan aims to “create a more equitable Canada for 2SLGBTQI+ communities, for present and future generations, to address persisting disparities faced by 2SLGBTQI+ communities and to build a safer, more inclusive country.” Canada's progressive stance on 2SLGBTQI+ rights reflects its commitment to equality and human rights. These initiatives and legislations not only protect individuals from discrimination but also affirm their identities and rights within Canadian society. Higher education institutions in Canada have obligations to carry on the spirit of human rights and support 2SLGBTQI+ students in all aspects, including the University of Calgary.

### **Identity Development**

Students experience their queer identities alongside their other identities, such as racial, ethnic, and disability identities (Duran & Pérez, 2017; Garvey et al., 2019; Means, 2017; Means et al., 2016; Miller, 2018). Multiple dimensions of students' identities were salient for them, so investigating this heterogeneous group of students would require an intersectionality lens. Furthermore, Formby (2017) suggested a need for nuanced understandings and responses to LGBT+ experiences at university and recommended practical implications in terms of inclusive campuses and curricula, as well as the provision of inclusive university-based advice, information, and support services. Therefore, it is worth evaluating the performance of the University of Calgary in serving its 2SLGBTQI+ students by exploring their students' lived experiences.

### **Transition to Postsecondary Education**

Going to a post-secondary institution is a significant turning point for many students, and campus life will have huge effects on their future personal and professional trajectories. The

transitional period from high school to university or college can be influential in the sexual identity development of queer youth who attend post-secondary institutions (Evans & Broido, 1999). It can often be the first time that many students have lived away from their parents, with some moving from rural to urban areas, and from home to foreign countries. With this independence, the sexual identities of many queer students begin to evolve (Waldo, 1998). This evolution presents new pressures, as students experience the stresses of both post-secondary life and emergent sexual selves (Zubernis & Snyder, 2007). Formby (2013) pointed out that poor educational experiences can lead to students missing classes, changing universities, and/or dropping out altogether. The 2SLGBTQI+ students' perceptions of the acceptance level on campus would inevitably affect their academic performance. It is yet not known if and to what extent students' lack of well-being and underachievement are related to their gender expression and sexual orientation.

### **Mental Health and Suicidal Risks**

Youth suicide has long been a serious concern in Canada, and 2SLGBTQI+ youth are considered to be a particularly vulnerable group. Peter and Taylor (2014) examined differences in suicidal behavior between LGBTQ university students and their non-LGBTQ counterparts at a Canadian university. The study revealed that compared to non-LGBTQ+ students, sexual minority youth are at a greater risk for serious suicidal ideation (8.9% versus 23%, respectively) and suicide attempts (3.5% versus 26.2%). Substantial research has shown that minority individuals (e.g., due to race/ethnicity or sexual or gender identity) may experience additional stress derived from their minority status (Meyer, 1995, 2013). According to the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), the stigma of being LGBTQ+, in addition to being at an increased risk for bullying and harassment, can lead to depression and feelings of hopelessness (Almeida et al.,

2009; Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Russell & Joyner, 2001). For LGBTQ youth the threat is not simply their mental health but also their life experiences or social stress. They are more likely to suffer from anxiety, psychological stress, and low self-esteem, which are the main risk factors leading to suicidal behaviors (Peter & Taylor, 2014). Goodenow et al. (2006) reported that perceived teacher and staff support was found to offset suicidal behavior for LGB students. It is vital for a post-secondary institution to foster an inclusive campus climate where 2SLGBTQI+ students can feel safe and comfortable. Whether or not the University of Calgary has created a safe living and learning space needs to be further examined.

### **Mentoring Relationships and Academic Achievement**

Sociological research has shed light on the importance of mentoring relationships, especially about education. The literature has shown that mentoring can help disadvantaged students access social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2018) that aids their academic achievement. Graham (2019) examined queer students' experiences with mentoring relationships in regard to education. The findings indicate that being openly queer posed an identity-based risk for students' ability to access mentoring relationships. Some departments at the University of Calgary provide mentorship programs to newly admitted students, however, the matching process is based on the mentors' and mentees' specializations and fields of study, and it is not clear if gender and sexuality factors would be taken into consideration.

### **Positive Trends and Persistent Challenges**

On the positive side, campus climate has overall improved over the past years and the existing literature supports the values of postsecondary curricula, role models, and communities in facilitating LGBTQ+ identity development (Jubas, 2018; Lo et al., 2022). Most LGBTQ+ students report that the campus climate in terms of their sense of belonging, safety, and inclusion

in university is better than the one they experienced in high school. For instance, a good number of Canadian universities have established Queer Student Centres (QSCs), which create a sense of community among their members (Evans & Herriott, 2004). By immersing themselves amongst other queer youth, students can begin to feel positive about their sexuality (Dietz & Dettlaff, 1997) and offset the effects of homophobia experienced on campus (Stevens, 2004). For “open” students, QSCs allow for involvement in social activities, whereas for “closeted” students, QSCs provide education on, and awareness of, sexuality issues (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006). Yet the progress is not consistent across institutions, especially for transgender students, who are more likely to suffer from transphobic harassment. As a result, this more marginalized group of students within the 2SLGBTQI+ community deserves extra research attention.

### **Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Students**

More students are coming out as gender non-conforming, yet universities have not been quick enough to recognize and respond to their needs (Beemyn, 2005; McKinney, 2005). Though limited, research on gender-nonconforming students suggested that a significantly higher proportion of transgender students experience compared with their LGB peers (Rankin, 2003). Transgender and gender non-conforming students encounter particular challenges navigating the gender binary system that is deeply embedded in schools (Airton, 2009a, 2009b; Ingrey, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Taylor et al., 2011). For transgender students, there are some specific approaches and strategies to build transgender inclusion and encourage their academic development. Woodford et al. (2017) suggested that providing gender-neutral washrooms and including gender-inclusive demographic options on institutional records and forms can reduce daily stressors and increase their belonging. Beemyn and Rankin (2016) offered recommendations such as using students’ pronouns, allowing transgender students to easily change their name and

gender on official and unofficial university documents, and inviting transgender speakers on campus.

Although anyone can be subject to discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation—whether actual or perceived—research suggests that these experiences are common among the transgender population (Dugan et al., 2012; Griner et al., 2017). The findings indicate that compared to their cisgender counterparts, transgender students were considerably more likely to experience insultation, mistreatment, ignorance, or exclusion due to their gender identity in a postsecondary setting. Furthermore, many transgender students expressed that they did not feel safe in and around their university environment. Feelings of safety are an important part of how people interpret the spaces around them; feeling unsafe harms mental well-being and quality of life, and can dissuade people from fully engaging with the world around them (Bastomski & Smith, 2016; Woodford & Kulick, 2014). It is not yet known how the 2SLGBTQI+ students perceive their sense of safety at the University of Calgary.

### **Gender-Neutral Washroom**

The terms gender-neutral, all-gender, genderless, inclusive, or unisex denote a space that serves as a “Third Space” (Fraser, 2016) to the binary gender/sex-segregated in public institutions (Ingrey, 2018). As Foucault (1977) relays, a power/knowledge dynamic entrenches society with a gender binary, heteronormative, and cisnormative system that uses spaces, such as the washroom, to establish a predetermined gendered truth. While progress is taking place in terms of introducing gender-neutral washrooms, many contemporary washrooms are still divided into two binary categories (i.e. male/female). In her book *Queering Bathrooms*, Cavanagh (2010) noted, “modern architectural design reflects a desire to eradicate gender difference and to sanitize sexuality”, and the washroom is influenced by the discourses of masculinity and



femininity as a “gendered architecture of exclusion” (p. 32). Despite transgender people having the right to use gender-neutral facilities such as washrooms and locker rooms, they are often disheartened by the lack of access to them. Laidlaw (2020) explored transgender students’ experiences of using on-campus facilities in two major universities in Ontario, and the findings suggest that there are pronounced gaps and barriers in access.

No or limited access to gender-neutral washrooms can have detrimental impacts on the well-being of transgender and gender-nonconforming people. Gendered public spaces can be both exclusionary and dangerous for transgender and non-conforming persons as well as cisgender individuals whose appearance may not conform to dominant gender norms. The creation and maintenance of gender-segregated spaces on campus contribute to the erasure of gender identity. Making all spaces inclusive and accessible for students of all gender identities is a vital component of creating a safe and inclusive environment for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals and challenging structural binarism and cissexism. Davies et al. (2019) argued that while the importance of providing gender-neutral washrooms is acknowledged in school policies of Canadian postsecondary institutions, widespread access throughout campuses is necessary so that the subjectivity and identities of all students can be affirmed and realized.

Gender-neutral washrooms are becoming popular in Canada as more postsecondary institutions, such as McGill University, the University of Toronto, the University of Winnipeg, and the University of Alberta, are introducing them on their campuses (Rhee, 2019). Transgender students have been advocating for access to and construction of gender-neutral facilities on university campuses across Canada (Ritchie, 2017). Some postsecondary institutions are taking leading roles in redefining, reforming, and restructuring the washroom landscape on campus. For instance, Queen’s University addressed the issue of gender binary/sex-segregated washrooms by

implementing the “Gender Neutral Washrooms Policy” in 2012. This official policy (Queen’s University, 2012) explained that both the Ontario Human Rights Commission and human rights decisions demonstrate,

People in the process of transitioning have a right to use the facilities designed for members of their felt gender; gender-specific washrooms can result in instances of harassment and violence towards those perceived by others as not being of the specified gender.

The policy also states:

The University shall ensure the existence of at least one gender-neutral washroom or change room with shower on every floor of every newly constructed or significantly renovated building on campus. Further, the University shall repurpose all single-user, gender-specific washrooms into gender-neutral facilities as funding becomes available. All such facilities must include signage that makes it absolutely clear that they are not restricted by gender. Without the existence of gender-neutral facilities, these individuals have no choice but to use gender-specific washrooms — an experience that can be uncomfortable, embarrassing, hurtful, frightening, and dangerous. Further, gender-specific facilities reflect a gender binary with which many individuals may not identify.

This comprehensive document not only defines Queen’s University’s responsibility to introduce more gender-neutral washrooms but also highlights the urgent needs of 2SLGBTQI+ people, particularly transgender and gender nonconforming students, to get access to inclusive spaces. In contrast, the University of Calgary has not had any official policy specific to gender-neutral washrooms. Little is known if the gender-neutral facilities at UCalgary are meeting the specific needs of transgender students. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the current status of

gender-neutral washrooms at the University of Calgary in terms of numbers, locations, and accessibility, as well as students' user experiences.

### **Campus Climate**

Campus climate in postsecondary institutions has been becoming friendlier and more inclusive towards gender and sexually diverse students over the decades. However, some research studies provide us with different pictures. Vaccaro (2012) maintained that colleges and universities remain largely hostile environments for LGBT students who generally perceive the campus climate as less inviting than their cisgender heterosexual peers. Furthermore, Rankin et al. (2010) found that about one-quarter of LGBQ students and one-third of transgender students had experienced harassment or violence on campus based on their sexual and/or gender identity. Similarly, Woodford et al. (2012) examined heterosexist language and its impacts on GLB students. The results indicated that heterosexist language was one of many mechanisms through which heterosexism compelled anti-gay sentiment toward GLB people. They also suggested that non-inclusive language such as "that's so gay" significantly and negatively influenced GLB students' health and well-being.

Queer students may encounter discrimination and harassment within post-secondary institutions. Previous studies conducted in the United States report that one-quarter to one-third of undergraduates experienced harassment within the past year, three-quarters viewed the campus climate as homophobic and 61 % were targets of derogatory remarks (Rankin, 2005; Rankin et al. 2010). Tetreault et al. (2013) report that approximately half of their 70 queer undergraduate respondents experienced unfair treatment by other students and close to 40 % of respondents experienced some form of harassment. Both "open" and "closeted" students reported receiving unfair treatment from students, professors, and administrators, with "open" students

perceiving the post-secondary environment more negatively than “closeted” students (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006).

Studies regarding gender/sexual identity disclosure are conflicting. Some research reported that 2SLGBTQI+ students who reveal their identities more openly experience harassment and victimization at higher rates than those students who do not (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003). Other scholars suggested that LGBT students who conceal their identities have less positive perceptions of campus climate (Tetreault et al, 2013). Such disparities in campus climate for LGBTQ students may prevent them from achieving academic success and/or integrating into the campus community (Rankin, 2003) because students who endure harassment and/or victimization on campus are less likely to have positive academic or social outcomes (Milem, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Reson et al, 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2006).

### **Classroom Climate**

Students spend a considerably large amount of time attending classes on campus. Understanding classroom climate is fundamentally important for LGBTQ undergraduate students, as it has influences on their learning, development, and persistence (Ancis et al., 2000; Chang, 2002; Whitt et al., 2001). Both instructors and non-2SLGBTQI+ students play decisive roles in fostering a classroom atmosphere that can have impacts on gender and sexually diverse individuals’ experiences. Garvey and Rankin (2015) argued that classroom dynamics and culture are shared responsibilities of both student affairs staff and faculty, and they must recognize the unique contexts of the classroom experience of LGBTQ students, particularly for gender non-conforming individuals. Several scholars have documented the negative experiences of LGBTQ university students in the classroom (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003). As a

consequence, these negative experiences may silence and isolate LGBTQ students from the classroom dynamics (Renn, 2010). Moreover, LGBT students may feel invisible because their identities and experiences are not represented in curricula (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003; Renn, 2010).

### **Inclusive Curriculum and Pedagogical Practices**

While the visibility of gender and sexually diverse students has been increasing, 2SLGBTQI+ students are often subject to discrimination and a hostile university campus climate (Nicolazzo, 2016). Gender and sexually diverse individuals deal with various kinds of prejudice and discrimination in their daily lives, including non-inclusive language used in classrooms. Collins and Clément (2012) conclude that there is an inseparable connection between language and prejudice. They argue that language plays a vital role in all forms of prejudice through explicit and implicit communication. Yet, it can also serve as a tool to challenge social norms and stereotypes. Three large-scale experiments conducted by Tavits and Pérez (2019) show that gender-neutral language can positively influence attitudes and beliefs about gender equality and increase acceptance of LGBT individuals by enhancing nonmale salience. Patev (2019) suggests that people who encounter more challenges in using gender-inclusive language tend to have more negative perceptions of transgender individuals, and vice versa, inclusive language may also indicate more positive attitudes. Therefore, there is an urgent need to examine how 2SLGBTQI+ students perceive the use of gender-inclusive/non-binary language in classrooms at the University of Calgary.

Rankin (2003) stated, “A heterosexist climate has not only inhibited the acknowledgment and expression of GLBT perspectives, it has also limited curricular initiatives and research efforts, as seen in the lack of GLBT content in the university course offerings” (p. 3). GLBT

students have demanded more courses covering GLBT topics and content in postsecondary classrooms (Rankin, 2003). There is a need to better understand UCalgary 2SLGBTQI+ students' perspectives on the current curricula, thus requiring an in-depth investigation of the 2SLGBTQI+ representation in classroom learning and teaching. To create more comprehensive and lasting curricular change, all disciplines must engage in “gender-complex education”—education that recognizes the existence and experiences of transgender people (Rand, 2011).

In the document entitled *LGBTQ2 Health Policy: Addressing the Needs of LGBTQ2 Post-Secondary Students* (Woodford, 2019) submitted to The House of Commons Standing Committee on Health Government of Canada by the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity and three scholars from Wilfrid Laurier University, the authors stressed the importance of advocating for LGBTQ2 students, and they contended that campuses must be welcoming, accepting, and inclusive spaces to foster LGBTQ2 students' health and wellbeing. They also argued that institutional policies and campus-based initiatives can be used to foster LGBTQ2 inclusion.

The number of 2SLGBTQI+ students has been increasing in postsecondary institutions across Canada. Postsecondary administrators and faculty members need to increase awareness of these students and work to create a safe classroom environment free from offensive language and practices so that they feel included and welcomed (Graff & Stufft, 2011). Research on creating inclusive curriculum for LGBTQ2S+ has largely focused on primary and secondary school contexts, particularly in English Language Arts classes. Dodge and Crutcher (2015) posited that incorporating LGBTQ stories into the standard curriculum can dismantle the dominant “single story” (p. 95) narratives and “serves to validate and promote acceptance of the experiences of LGBTQ youths” (pp. 95-96) so that these students can see themselves and reaffirm their identity.

This practice can help build an inclusive classroom and socially just school for all students. Page (2016) stressed the positive impacts of queer inclusion and inclusive curriculum and argued that “literacy educators have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of queer-identifying students and help stem the tide of harassment, violence, depression, and other issues often experienced by gender and sexual minority learners” (p. 678). In higher education, a considerable number of studies have been conducted to enhance medical school curricula for healthcare trainees and professionals (Cooper et al., 2018; Holthouser et al., 2017 O’Leary & Kunkel, 2021; Sawning et al., 2017; Sekoni et al., 2017; Sequeira et al., 2012).

### **Discrimination**

All forms of discrimination can create an environment in which people feel disrespected, excluded, and potentially unsafe. In the postsecondary environment, discrimination creates obstacles to students’ full participation and may hinder their success (Asquith et al., 2019; Levchak, 2013). In recent years, there have been increasing discussions on the rights of transgender people and those whose gender identity fits outside the traditional dichotomy of “woman” and “man”, as members of these groups and their allies draw attention to barriers in academia and beyond (Griner et al., 2017). Concurrently, people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer also draw attention to the inequalities they encounter in the postsecondary system and elsewhere (Friedman & Leaper, 2010; Woodford & Kulick, 2014). For these reasons, discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation in the postsecondary setting deserves more research.

### **Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are subtle, everyday actions or comments, whether intentional or unintentional, that express discrimination or hostility towards minority groups (William et al.,

2021). LGBTQ microaggression on campus is associated with negative self-concept, low self-esteem (Sue, 2010), perceiving oneself as a burden (Baams et al., 2018), loneliness, social withdrawal (Hatzenbuehler, 2009), internalization of homophobia, unhealthy identity development, feelings of guilt, shame, sadness, and anger (Woodford et al., 2012), hypervigilance (Timmerman & Volpe, 2023), and increased risk of psychological distress (Nadal et al., 2010; Woodford et al., 2012). Microaggressions against LGBTQ individuals are a critical issue on postsecondary campuses, as the student years are vital for the development of LGBTQ identity (Bilodeau, 2005; Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Ogunyemi et al., 2020). The literature shows that LGBTQ microaggression has severe, long-term health impacts on sexual and gender minority students (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). LGBTQ persons constitute a minority in heteronormative educational institutes and are more susceptible to various mental health problems (Hafeez et al., 2017; Wilson & Cariola, 2020) as a consequence of minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Since university years may overlap students' gender and sexual identity development, microaggressions encountered during this period can have profound effects on the lives of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. A systemic review by Maji and Sarika (2024) showed that LGBTQ2S+ microaggression has negative impacts on the educational performances and mental well-being of LGBTQ2S+ students. Thus, it is important to investigate if different forms of microaggressions exist in the learning environment at the University of Calgary.

Parker (2021) explored the relationship between LGBTQ students' perceptions of the campus diversity climate and their sense of belonging. The findings revealed that positive perceptions of the campus climate are strongly associated with a greater sense of belonging for all LGBTQ students. He suggested that when developing and implementing policies, practices,



and processes, higher education stakeholders should consider LGBTQ students' unique perceptions of their environment and their feelings of respect.

### **Bystander Intervention and Ally Programs**

Heterosexual peers can become powerful allies of their 2SLGBTQI+ counterparts. Dessel et al. (2017) examined the factors associated with intended bystander intervention among heterosexual students when witnessing discrimination against LGBTQ individuals on university campuses. The authors argued that bystander intervention plays a significant role in “creating a safe and inclusive campus for all students and is critical to supporting targeted students” (p. 101). Their findings indicated that having LGBT friends, holding friendly attitudes toward LGBTQ people, having taken courses with diversity-related content, being older, and possessing higher self-esteem were each independently linked to a great likelihood of intending to intervene. Aiming to raise 2SLGBTQI+ awareness as well as heterosexual and cisgender privilege, many universities developed ally programs to foster a pro-LGBT bystander community (Dessel et al., 2017; Woodford et al., 2014). Given that heterosexuals constitute the majority group on campus, it is imperative to encourage bystander interventions from heterosexual campus members. However, to my knowledge, the University of Calgary does not have such initiatives.

### **Homophobia, Heterosexism, Heteronormativity, and Cisgenderism**

Homophobia has been a popular term and psychological construct for decades (Blumenfeld, 2000). The concept of homophobia was first explicitly discussed by Weinberg (1972), defining it as a phobic illness characterized by a “dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals” (p. 10). In his book *Homophobia: A History*, Fone (2000) thoroughly discussed this concept and its history. According to him, homophobia is “invented, fostered, and supported” by different institutions of society—“religion, government, law, and science”, and

“tends to break out with special venom when people imagine a threat to the security of gender roles, of religious doctrine, or of the state and society, or to the sexual safety and health of the individual” (pp. 6-7). Offensive and derogatory epithets such as “faggot” (gay man) and “dyke” (lesbian woman) are used in a society where homophobia is tolerated, despite being considered unacceptable by the others (Fone, 2000). He also suggested that homophobia exists in both non-homosexual and homosexual people as a form of sexism and disapproval of another kind of sexuality, which may be a consequence of the internalization of lessons from a homophobic society—“internalized homophobia” (Weinberg, 1972, p. 83). Although homophobia was and is still being used by many academic scholars and researchers, Plummer (1998) argued that the use of homophobia is problematic as a social science concept and raised four concerns: “that it reinforces the idea of mental illness, that it neglects women, that it directs attention away from sexual oppression in general and that it individualizes the entire problem” (p. 89).

Heterosexism is another term used to describe oppression directed against gender and sexual minorities. Herek (2004) referred to heterosexism as “the cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma by denying and denigrating any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community” (p. 16). Herek also argued that heterosexism is inherent in cultural institutions and sustains a hierarchy of power dynamics that depreciates anything non-heterosexual. Blumenfeld (2013) defined heterosexism as the following:

The overarching system of advantages bestowed on heterosexuals based on the institutionalization of heterosexual norms or standards and founded on the ideology that all people are or should be heterosexual, which privileges heterosexuals and heterosexuality, while excluding the needs, concerns, cultures, and life experiences of lesbians, gay males, bisexuals, pansexuals, and asexuals” (p. 373).

He argued that heterosexism is more inclusive and expansive than terms based on a phobia (e.g., homophobia, lesbophobia, biphobia, and transphobia). However, Seal (2019) expressed that this term is limited because it is uncritical and does not aim to explore who benefits from this belief system or to reveal the power dynamics underlying these constructions. Blumenfeld (2013) offered an example of heterosexism in the educational context: teachers assuming that all their students are heterosexual and teaching only about the contributions of heterosexuals. While heterosexism is not specifically targeted at LGB individuals, it can manifest as antigay prejudice and lead to stigma, stress, perceived offensiveness, and decreased willingness to come out (Burn et al., 2005). Heterosexism has direct influences on 2SLGBTQI+ students in postsecondary institutions. Experiencing heterosexist discrimination can have negative impacts on LGBQ students' health and well-being (Meyer, 2003), and can interfere with their educational performance (Woodford & Kulick, 2015). Rankin et al. (2010) found that LGBQ students suffered additional stressors due to heterosexism on college campuses. Research suggests that heterosexist interpersonal and environmental microaggressions occur on college campuses at considerably higher rates than overt heterosexism (Woodford et al., 2014). In addition, Hong et al. (2016) investigated ambient heterosexism on campuses at the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem levels. The findings suggest that ambient heterosexism strongly correlated with interpersonal microaggressions, and LGBQ students encountered avoidance behaviours, subtle verbal abuse, and blatant physical threats.

Heteronormativity has become a trendy term used by both queer and feminist scholars. Ingraham (2002) noted heteronormativity emerged in the 1970s as second-wave feminists attempted to theorize and comprehend the origin of women's oppression. She drew on one of the earliest examples, from an article entitled "The Normative status of heterosexuality" (1975)

published by a Dutch group, The Purple September Staff, which maintained that “heterosexuality is really a normalized power arrangement that limits options and privileges men over women and reinforces and naturalizes male dominance” (p. 74). However, Jackson (2005) argued that feminists and queer theorists interpret heteronormativity differently, despite having shared concerns. While the former has historically concentrated on “male dominance within heterosexual relations”, the latter has focused their attention on how “heteronormativity renders alternatives to heterosexuality ‘other’ and marginal” (p. 22). The author also stated that both heteronormativity and male dominance needs to be challenged to effectively critique heterosexuality.

Chambers (2007) viewed heteronormativity as a concept revealing “institutional, cultural and legal norms that reify and entrench the normativity of heterosexuality” (pp. 664-665) and used this term to express the political power that heterosexuality wields when it functions as the norm. He defined this term theoretically as the following:

Heteronormativity means, quite simply, that heterosexuality is the norm, in culture, in society, in politics. Heteronormativity points out the expectation of heterosexuality as it is written into our world. It does not, of course, mean that everyone is straight. More significantly, heteronormativity is not part of a conspiracy theory that would suggest everyone must become straight or be made so. The importance of the concept is that it centers on the operation of the norm. Heteronormativity emphasizes the extent to which everyone, straight or queer, will be judged, measured, probed, and evaluated from the perspective of the heterosexual norm. It means that everyone and everything is judged from the perspective of straight. (Chambers, 2003, p. 26).

Seal (2019) stated his preference for heteronormative and heteronormativity as they imply a more systemic perspective on sexuality by incorporating other social constructs, such as gender, as essential components of heterosexuality. In his book entitled *The Interruption of Heteronormativity in Higher Education: Critical Queer Pedagogies*, he documented four prominent studies on LGBT students in the UK and all suggested that homophobia is still prevalent on campuses (Bachman & Gooch, 2018; Ellis, 2008; Equality Challenge Unit, 2009; National Union of Students, 2014). He also provided a case study that examines how institutional heteronormativity is exhibited within a specific course at some postsecondary institutions. Many of his findings concurred with Queen et al.'s research (2004) at Syracuse University. Seal stated, "I concurred with their analysis heteronormativity is pervasive and invisible, and sexuality can be embedded in unsuspected parts of the curriculum and with the importance of considering students' experience of homophobia inside and outside the classroom". He finally called on pedagogical practitioners to adopt both critical and queer pedagogies to disrupt heteronormativity in higher education.

Cisgenderism refers to "the cultural and systemic ideology that denies, denigrates, or pathologizes self-defined gender identities that do not align with assigned gender at birth as well as resulting behaviour, expression, and community" (Lennon & Mistler, 2014, p. 63). The authors noted that cisgenderism creates a hierarchy that values cisgender identities and expressions yet punishes transgender individuals who do not conform to cisgender rules and expectations. The authors also pointed out that cisgenderism is prevalent in many cultural institutions, leading to prejudice and discrimination against transgender people. Cisgenderism exists in post-secondary institutions, particularly in the field of medicine. Cisnormative cultures dominated Canadian medical programs and contributed to the erasure of both transgender and

gender-nonconforming students and patients (Butler et al., 2019). Yates (2019) conducted a literature review on transgender students' experiences in postsecondary education in the US. The findings showed that transgender students disproportionately experienced significant emotional, developmental, and psychological distress caused by a hostile and gender-segregated campus environment and the lack of knowledge on transgenderism among the student population. Therefore, given these facts, it is necessary to investigate the degree to which cisgenderism is embedded at the University of Calgary and how it affects transgender and gender-nonconforming students' experiences.

### **Research on 2SLGBTQI+ Students at the University of Calgary**

To my knowledge, there was very limited research that has explored the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at the University of Calgary. In one notable study, Jubas (2018) investigated LGBTQ+ people's experiences at Western post-secondary institutions in the light of discourses of equity and internationalization. The specific tensions are inclusion/exclusion, safety/risk, "freedom" to come out/expectation to pass, and ally/other (Jubas, 2018). The well-being and experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students should be of interest to all the stakeholders of the university if they are committed to creating an equal, equitable, and welcoming learning and teaching environment. 2SLGBTQI+ students should thrive not only in academic life but also be empowered to fully and successfully participate in society after graduation. More studies need to be conducted that focus on the lived experiences of gender and sexually minoritized students in postsecondary institutions.

### Chapter Three—Methodology

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at the University of Calgary. I believe that a better understanding of gender and sexually diverse students' campus lives would inform educational stakeholders of their perceived challenges and opportunities. I intended to use the findings of this research to hold UCalgary accountable for better meeting the needs of this minoritized and marginalized group of students by creating a safer and more inclusive learning and teaching environment for all students. In seeking to investigate 2SLGBTQI+ students' university experiences, this study addressed three overarching questions: (a) Quantitative question—What is the University of Calgary's overall performance in terms of supporting 2SLGBTQI+ students? (b) Qualitative question—What challenges and opportunities are 2SLGBTQI+ students experiencing at the University of Calgary? (c) Mixed methods question—How do the 2SLGBTQI+ students' perceptions of the inclusiveness level of UCalgary reflect their actual campus experiences?

The following research questions pertain to the specific lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at the University of Calgary: (a) What are 2SLGBTQI+ students' views on classroom atmosphere? (e.g., language use of the instructors/classmates/faculty members) (b) What are 2SLGBTQI+ students' opinions regarding the accessibility to 2SLGBTQI+ resources? (e.g., experiences with the Q Centre and any Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion [EDI] events related to gender and sexual diversity). (c) What impressions do 2SLGBTQI+ students have regarding the awareness of EDI issues among healthcare providers? (d) What are 2SLGBTQI+ students' perceptions of campus climate toward gender and sexual minorities? (e) How do 2SLGBTQI+ students rate the overall quality of campus life at the University of Calgary? (f) From their perspective as members of the gender and sexually minoritized groups, what do

2SLGBTQI+ students see as the benefits or pitfalls of higher education? (g) How can the University of Calgary improve its policies and practices to better support and meet the needs of 2SLGBTQI+ students?

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and includes discussions around the following areas: (a) rationale for research approach, (b) description of the research sample, (c) overview of research design, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis and synthesis, (f) ethical considerations, (g) limitations of the study. The chapter culminates with a brief concluding summary.

### **Rationale for Both Qualitative and Quantitative Research**

Qualitative research provides deep insights and a rich, contextualized understanding of complex social phenomena. It emphasizes discovery and description, aiming to uncover the meanings people attach to their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As Merriam (2009) states, qualitative research is "an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there" (p. 5). This approach allows researchers to explore the nuances of human behavior and social interactions, capturing the subtleties that quantitative methods might overlook (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). Through methods such as interviews, observations, and content analysis, qualitative research provides a comprehensive and holistic view of the subject matter, fostering a deep and nuanced understanding of the studied phenomena (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative approaches allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of 2SLGBTQI+ students' campus experiences, and the 2SLGBTQI+ students to tell their stories.

Quantitative research enables researchers to collect large amounts of data, which can be statistically analyzed to identify patterns, relationships, and trends (Creswell, 2014). When designed carefully, this approach provides a high level of reliability and validity, as it relies on



standardized instruments and procedures (Babbie, 2010). Additionally, quantitative research allows for the generalization of findings to larger populations, making it a powerful tool for testing hypotheses and establishing causal relationships (Muijs, 2010). As Creswell (2014) notes, quantitative research designs are rigorously structured, allowing researchers to manage variables and identify causal relationships. Its systematic nature facilitates clear, replicable, and verifiable results, contributing to the robustness of the scientific inquiry (Babbie, 2010). Quantitative approaches not only allowed me to see a bird-view picture of the gender and sexual diversity at UCalgary but also to hear more voices from the broader 2SLGBTQI+ community.

Despite all the strengths qualitative research and quantitative have respectively, they all have certain limitations. Scholars have compared and summarized the strengths and weaknesses of these two approaches (see Creswell, 2015; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that if findings are supported by both methods, there is increased confidence in the overall conclusion. Conversely, if the findings diverge, the researcher gains valuable insights and can adjust interpretations and conclusions accordingly. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2004), the objective of combining approaches is not merely to seek corroboration but to broaden and deepen the overall understanding of the subject. I contended that the combination of complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative research would be the most appropriate to answer my research questions.

### **Rationale for Mixed Methods Approach**

Mixed methods research is gaining prominence and recognition as the third major research paradigm, alongside quantitative and qualitative research (Johnson et al., 2007). After summarizing 19 definitions from the leaders in the field, the authors proposed the definition:

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration (p. 123).

Greene (2007) conceptualized mixed methods as a way of seeing the social world that “actively invites us to participate in dialogue about multiple ways of seeing and hearing, multiple ways of making sense of the social world, and multiple standpoints on what is important and to be valued and cherished” (p. 20).

Mixed methods research can have three different drives—“equal-status/interactive study, qualitative driven study, and quantitatively driven study” (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017, p. 113) and Johnson et al. (2004) also provided potential definitions of each type, respectively:

The area around the center of the continuum, *equal status*, is the home for the person that self-identifies as a mixed methods researcher. This researcher takes as his or her starting point the logic and philosophy of mixed methods research. These mixed methods researchers are likely to believe that qualitative and quantitative data and approaches will add insights as one considers most, if not all, research questions.

Qualitative dominant mixed methods research is the type of mixed research in which one relies on a qualitative, constructivist-poststructuralist-critical view of the research process, while concurrently recognizing that the addition of quantitative data and approaches are likely to benefit most research projects.

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concurrently recognizing that the addition of qualitative data and approaches are likely to benefit most research projects (pp. 122-123).

According to Creswell (2015), mixed methods research is:

An approach to research in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two, and then draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data to understand research problems (p. 2).

Creswell (2015) provided three basic mixed methods designs. The first is a *convergent design* in which the research aims to gather and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data, then combine the findings from the two data analyses to compare the results. The second is an *explanatory sequential design* that starts with quantitative methods and then uses qualitative methods to provide a deeper explanation of the quantitative findings. The third is an “exploratory sequential design, intending to initially investigate a problem using qualitative methods.

Following this initial exploration, the researcher uses the qualitative findings to develop a subsequent quantitative phase of the project. In the third phase, the quantitative tools, interventions, or variables are employed in a quantitative data collection and analysis process.

Creswell (2015) also proposed three types of advanced designs: “intervention designs”, “social justice/transformational designs”, and “multistage evaluation designs” (p. 7).

Mixed methods has become the “third methodological movement” (Tshakkori & Teddie, 2003, p. 5), “the third research paradigm” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15), and a new star in the social science sky” (Mayring, 2007, p. 1). Mixed methods research has also emerged as an approach in which researchers deliberately combine quantitative and qualitative research methods to better understand a research problem by leveraging their complementary strengths

and differences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Plano Clark (2017) supported this by explaining that mixed methods research studies facilitate the synergistic combination of various elements of quantitative and qualitative research, including their distinct perspectives, objectives, research questions, data sources, analytical techniques, and interpretations.

Mixed methods research has the potential to enhance the overall quality and depth of research methodology. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) contended that mixed methods research can serve as the natural complement to traditional qualitative and quantitative research. The authors argued that the methodological pluralism of mixed methods research often produces superior research compared to monomethod research. They believed that understanding the strengths and weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research enables a researcher to combine strategies effectively and apply Johnson and Turner's (2003) *fundamental principle of mixed methods*. According to their principle, researchers should collect multiple data using various strategies, approaches, and methods so that the resulting combination is likely to lead to complementary strengths and nonoverlapping weaknesses (also see Brewer & Hunter, 1989).

For example, in a qualitative research study, the researcher might want to conduct qualitative observations or interviews but supplement these with a closed-ended instrument to systematically evaluate certain factors deemed important in the relevant research literature (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Furthermore, these two authors purported that epistemological and methodological pluralism should be encouraged in educational research to inform researchers about various possibilities and ultimately enable them to conduct research more effectively.

Creswell (2015) argued that using mixed methods is appropriate when quantitative or qualitative research alone cannot address the issues adequately due to the inherent weaknesses of

each approach. More specifically, quantitative research does not sufficiently capture personal experiences or deeply investigate individual perspectives while findings generated from a small sample by qualitative research cannot apply to a larger group (Creswell, 2015). However, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches would make up for the deficiencies of the other by realizing precision and generalization as well as a comprehensive understanding of experiences and perspectives. In addition, McKim (2017) conducted a mixed methods study to explore the perceived value of mixed methods research for graduate students. The findings of the quantitative phase indicated that students rated the mixed methods passage as more valuable than those who rated the quantitative or qualitative passages. The results of the qualitative phase suggested that graduate students perceive mixed methods passages as having rigorous methodologies, a newer history, and offering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The mixed methods approach allowed me to collect diverse perspectives from more students in the 2SLGBTQI+ community and at the same time, provided me the opportunity to engage in dialogues to hear unique voices and rich stories from each 2SLGBTQI+ participant.

### **Research Sample**

I employed nonprobability sampling strategies to recruit this study's participants. Nonprobability sampling is a method in which samples are collected through a process that does not ensure all participants or units in the population have an equal opportunity to be selected. In this approach, subjective criteria are used to determine which elements are included in the sample (Etikan et al., 2016). According to Acharya et al. (2013), the most commonly used non-probability sampling techniques are convenience/purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling. I used both convenience sampling and purposive sampling as Etikan et al. (2016) pointed out that researchers can use them to choose a sample of subjects/units from a

population, such as school students (Acharya et al., 2013). Convenience sampling aims to ensure that the knowledge obtained reflect the broader population from which the sample is taken, whereas purposive sampling involves selecting participants based on the study's objectives, expecting each individual to contribute distinct and valuable information to the research (Etikan et al., 2016). I also adopted the snowball sampling method which is also called network or chain sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2015). In this sampling procedure, the initial respondents are selected using either probability or non-probability methods, and subsequent respondents are recruited based on information provided by the initial respondents (Acharya et al., 2013). I selected this approach for its ability to rely on personal networks to reach individuals from potentially marginalized communities, whereby it was advertised in the hopes that eligible respondents would complete it, and then bring it to the attention of others. The inclusion criterion was all participants who identified as 2SLGBTQI+ and were enrolled in a study program at the University of Calgary. The research sample included 64 survey respondents, 18 of them participated in the interview.

### **Integration**

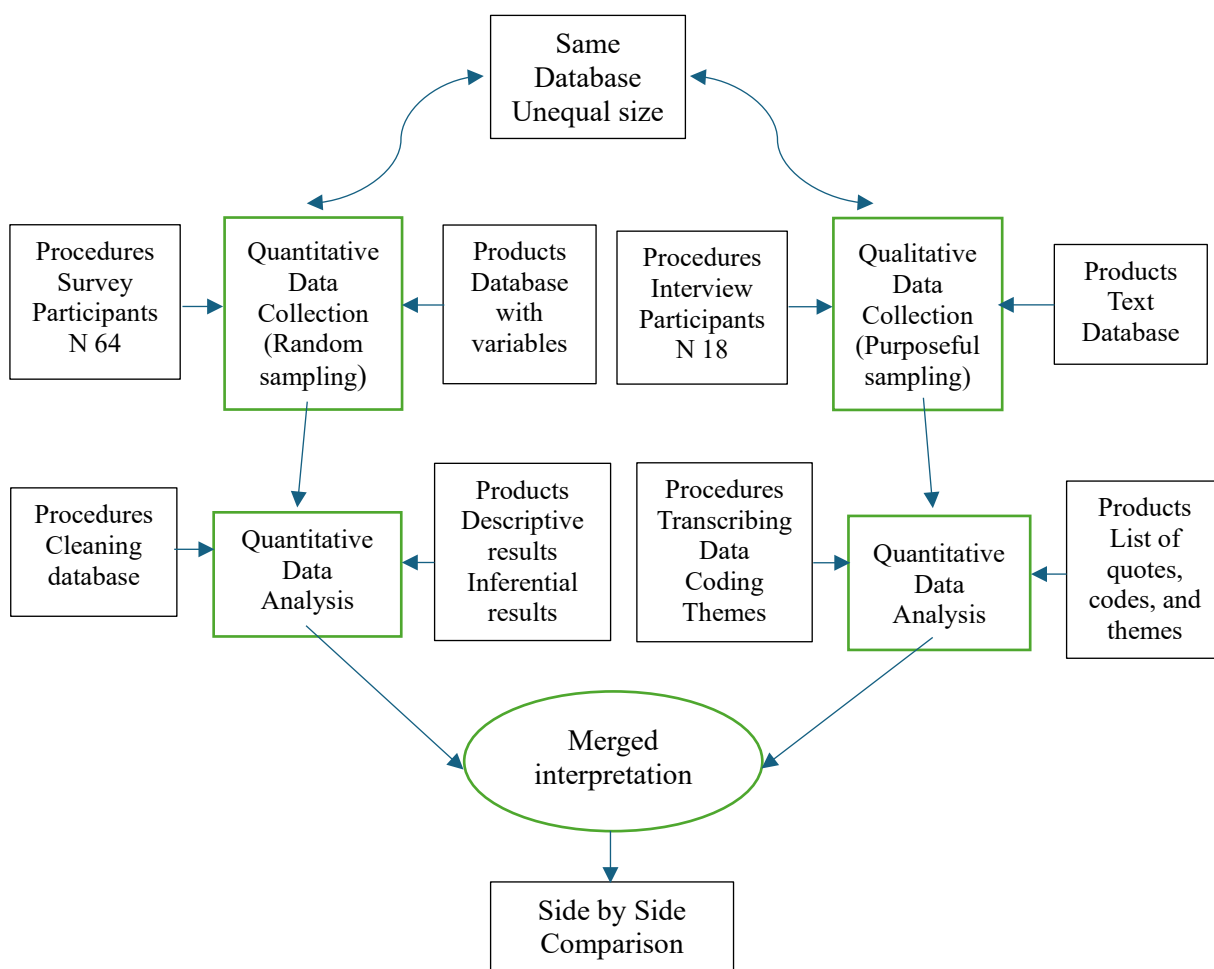
According to Creswell (2015), "Integration is the place in the mixed methods research process where the quantitative and the qualitative phases intersect or bump up against each other" (p. 82). He argued that the quantitative and qualitative data can either be integrated or remain distinct. Furthermore, integration can take place in a few possible phases in a mixed methods study (Fetter et al., 2013). For example, the researcher might collect survey responses composed of both closed-ended and open-ended questions (Creswell, 2015). In a convergent design, data merging occurs when the results from the analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data are combined and compared (Creswell, 2015). Finally, he suggested that the

mixed method researcher can represent integration through a discussion where quantitative and qualitative results are presented sequentially, in a parallel manner, which is a popular model for the convergent design.

### **Overview of Research Design** (see Figure 1)

I chose the convergent design for my mixed methods research. Creswell (2015) stated that a convergent design intends to merge the findings of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses, which offers a mixed picture of the issue being investigated. He argued that each type of data provides different insights, and their combination leads to seeing the problem from various angles and perspectives. He reiterated, “Both are useful results, and their combination adds up to not only more data, but also a more complete understanding than what would have been provided by each database alone” (p. 36). Therefore, the convergent design enables the mixed methods researchers to gain different perspectives or even verify a single database (Creswell, 2015).

**Figure 1** A convergent mixed methods design of UCalgary 2SLGBTQI+ students' lived experiences



Adapted from the diagram example provided by Creswell (2015, p. 59)

The following list summarizes the steps used to carry out this research. I will provide a more in-depth discussion following this list.

1. Prior to the commencement of data collection, I conducted a literature review to study the scholarships of other researchers in the field of 2SLGBTQI+ students' university experiences and relevant 2SLGBTQI+ topics and issues in postsecondary institutions/higher education.



2. I acquired ethics approval from CFREB to proceed with the research. The approval process involved outlining all procedures and processes needed to ensure adherence to standards for the study of human subjects, including participants' confidentiality and informed consent.
3. I used the survey to collect quantitative dominant data and recruit potential participants for the interview. Survey respondents who expressed their interest in participating in the interview were contacted by email with informed consent.
4. I conducted open-ended and semi-structured interviews with 18 2SLGBTQI+ students at the University of Calgary.
5. I transcribed the interview data verbatim and analyzed it with the survey responses both interactively and separately after the last interview was finished.
6. The survey and the interview are independent instruments in my mixed methods study, but there were times of integration, interaction, and dependence.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection process was hampered by the restrictions and quarantine measures implemented by local governments around the globe. This study occurred during the pandemic, so I treated my participants' health and safety as a priority while following the hygiene and health instructions implemented by the University of Calgary and the government of Alberta, I conducted the entire study virtually through an electronic survey and a teleconferencing platform.

### **Survey**

I chose the survey as the quantitative instrument for this study. Online surveying, now the dominant mode of survey delivery, offers significant advantages for sensitive research,

particularly when investigating the gender and sexual minority community (Toepoel, 2017). Online qualitative surveys provide an accessible and anonymous platform, encouraging participation from individuals who may feel uncomfortable with face-to-face interviews (Braun et al., 2017; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Terry & Braun, 2017). All participants in this study are 2SLGBTQI+ students, the online survey provided a safe space for them to express themselves without fear of judgment, which is crucial given the sensitive nature of gender and sexual identity topics (Davey et al., 2019). In addition, this method can also reach a diverse and geographically dispersed population, ensuring a wide range of experiences and perspectives are captured (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Additionally, the flexibility and anonymity of online surveys lead to higher response rates and more reliable data. In sum, online surveys respect participants' privacy, expand reach, and inclusivity, and enhance the quality of data collected.

I designed an online questionnaire (see Appendix A) by using Qualtrics in three language versions (i.e., English, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese). It was adapted from the research project conducted by the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (2015) that explored LGBTQ+ students' experiences and attitudes at Ontario universities. I made changes and modifications to fit the UCalgary context. It was delivered via a protected link that cannot be traced back to any respondent, thus ensuring the full anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Respondents were directed to a link hosted on the website of Qualtrics, which led to the opening letter and the survey itself. The survey aimed to examine UCalgary's performance in terms of supporting 2SLGBTQI+ students. Most advertising occurred via social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), campus newsletters, and other digital means. In addition, I designed a poster that informs the potential participants about the study, and I distributed the posters across different campus buildings and centres for students (e.g., WRC and FSC). The QR

code printed on it could be scanned via smart devices (e.g. phone, tablet computer). Should interested participants have any questions or concerns, they could contact me or/and my supervisor through the contact information displayed on the poster.

The questionnaire instrument in my study was quantitative-oriented and it helped generate a good overview of the demographic of 2SLGBTQI+ students at UCalgary and their perceptions of campus inclusiveness and views on 2SLGBTQI+-related issues. The two open-ended questions provided the respondents with a good opportunity to share their perspectives on challenges facing 2SLGBTQI+ students and how to foster a more inclusive campus climate, especially for those who chose not to participate in the interviews. The last question in the survey was to ask the respondents if they would be interested in participating in an interview.

## **Interviews**

I selected the interview as the qualitative tool for data collection in this research because it has the potential to elicit rich and thick descriptions. A significant advantage of collecting data through individual in-depth interviews is the potential to capture a person's perspective on an event or experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The interview is a fundamental tool in qualitative research (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Seidman, 2012). Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) describe the qualitative research interview as an “attempt to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of the subject’s experiences, to uncover their lived world” (p. 1). Similarly, Patton (1990) asserts, “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 278). My rationale for using this data collection method is that interacting with people—talking to and listening to them—is a legitimate way to generate data, thereby capturing the meaning of their experiences in their own words.

I engaged in interpretative forms of research that regard education as a lived experience and school as a process of learning (Merriam, 1998). To obtain an in-depth understanding and interpretation of the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students, I focused on case studies as the method to investigate the participants' perceptions of inclusiveness at UCalgary. I conducted open-ended and semi-structured interviews because they enable the researcher to adapt follow-up questions to “respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to the new ideas emerging on the topic” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74).

### **Interview schedule and process**

I sent individual emails to prospective participants describing the purpose of the study, inviting and confirming their participation with informed consent required for participation in this study (see Appendix B). 18 individuals signed the consent form and returned it to me. I sent follow-up emails to request a convenient date and time for a virtual interview. Once they indicated their preferred availabilities, I created a secured (password protection) Zoom invitation and sent the link to the participant. I conducted all interviews on Zoom between October 2021 and January 2022. Before each interview commenced, I informed the interviewee of their rights and the overview of the interview. The interview guide is included in Appendix C. The interview sessions were recorded and stored on the local drive of my private laptop. At the end of the interview, I checked in with the participants to ensure their well-being and to enquire if they needed additional support. Upon completion of the interview, I transcribed the recordings.

### **Interaction between Survey and Interview**

The collection of survey responses and interview sessions took place simultaneously. That is, while the survey was being active and responses were being collected, the conversations with interview participants were also going on. The survey itself served as a tool to recruit

interview participants. Based on interviewees' responses to survey questions, I adjusted and tailored the interview questions so that interview participants could have the maximum agency and space to share more of their perspectives and elaborate on their viewpoints. In addition, both the survey and the interview asked the participants' opinions about the challenges they face as gender and sexually diverse students, as well as the actions the University of Calgary can take to better support this minoritized and marginalized community. I could use this data to make comparisons to increase the validity and credibility of the findings. Schoonenboom and Johnson (2017) argued that a true mixed methods study requires at least one "point of integration/interface" (Guest, 2013; Morse & Niehaus, 2009) when the qualitative and quantitative components are combined. These "interactions" are the mixing moments of quantitative and qualitative approaches in my mixed methods study.

### **Data Analysis and Synthesis**

I conducted data analysis in two main stages: quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis. The survey administered included primarily closed-ended questions designed to collect quantitative data. I reviewed the raw data collected from the survey for any missing values. Incomplete responses were disregarded from the analysis to ensure the accuracy of the results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I used descriptive statistics to summarize the data. I calculated measures such as mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency distributions to present an overview of the respondents' demographics and their responses to the survey questions (Field, 2018).

The qualitative data was obtained from the open-ended questions in the survey and individual narratives from the qualitative interviews. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim because this process ensured that all the nuanced details of the participants' responses

were captured accurately (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For the interview data, individual narratives were constructed for each participant. This narrative approach allowed for a detailed understanding of each participant's experiences and perspectives. The narratives were then analyzed to identify common themes and unique insights (Riessman, 2008). Triangulation was used to enhance the credibility and validity of the qualitative findings. This involved crosschecking the themes identified from the survey's open-ended responses with the themes from the interview narratives. Any discrepancies were further investigated and reconciled (Patton, 2015).

The final step was to synthesize the quantitative and qualitative findings, which provided a holistic understanding of the research problems. Some themes from the qualitative analysis were used to contextualize and interpret the quantitative results, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the data (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). By employing both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques, this research ensures a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the research questions. The integration of these methods allows for the strengths of each approach to complement the other, providing robust and insightful findings.

### **Limitations**

This study is a mixed-method design featuring both quantitative and qualitative elements. I used the methods of surveys and interviews. Due to the nature of the population and the resources available, it was not easy to directly contact a sample of eligible participants. As a result, it is possible that 2SLGBTQI+ students with a certain perspective (those most involved with advocacy and activism, for example) were more likely to participate. However, those who are the most engaged in seeking fairness and justice would provide more useful and in-depth data to analyze. The research only focused on the lived experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at the

University of Calgary and how to enact positive changes that could nurture a more diverse and inclusive space on campus, so the findings might not represent the situation of 2SLGBTQI+ students in other post-secondary institutions in Canada and abroad. Also, the implications generated may not be applied to other (school) contexts. That is, the findings and implications will be specific to one geographical area and may not be easily generalizable.

I would also like to acknowledge that the 2SLGBTQI+ community is a diverse and non-homogenous group, and as such, the voices of my participants do not fully represent the views of all gender and sexual minority students at UCalgary. In addition, most of the survey and interview participants were non-indigenous Canadian students, while the number of two-spirited and international students may have been under-represented. It is worth noting that the University of Calgary has an overseas campus in Qatar that is not included in this study. It can be anticipated that due to the local conservative laws and values regarding gender and sexually diverse people, as well as the social attitudes towards this minoritized and marginalized group, the 2SLGBTQI+ students on that campus may have different lived experiences.

Heterosexual people have been strong supporters of advances in the equality rights of 2SLGBTQI+ people, and without their great efforts, 2SLGBTQI+ people may not have come this far on the road to equality. Though heterosexual activists' voices should not be ignored and neglected, I have expressly decided not to include straight allies and friends in this study. In addition, there is a great diversity among the 2SLGBTQI+ student population concerning intersections of multiple identities. Various social group identities interact with one another, and several forms of oppression can overlap and compound the experience of oppression for minoritized groups (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). For instance, 2SLGBTQI+ students of color may experience double or even triple discrimination (racism and homophobia from both inside

and outside the community). Furthermore, graduate students' perceptions of campus life might differ from those of undergraduates. While I considered these factors, the main concentration in this study was the overall experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students and how UCalgary can improve policies and practices regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion matters pertaining specifically to gender and sexual diversity.

### **Ethics**

Before beginning this study, I needed to obtain ethical clearance to work with human subjects. I acquired the Canadian Tri-Council certificate "Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans Course on Research Ethics" (TCPS 2: CORE) and completed the registration in IRISS. I submitted an ethics application to the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) for review and approval. It is important to release the details of the research with the study design so that the audience can determine for themselves the credibility of the study (Neuman, 2009). I explicitly described and explained the objectives of the study to all my participants for clarification. Informed consent forms were obtained in advance from the participants to confirm their participation. They had the right to choose their own pseudonyms or keep their real names. A few participants changed their minds and decided not to take part in further discussion in the interview, I fully respected their decisions.

In this study, I respected entirely the participants' choice of study participation. I informed my participants that they could have chosen to withdraw from the research project at any time if they wished. During the process of collecting and analyzing the data, I did my utmost to ensure that all my participants had an opportunity to have their voices heard. Survey participants were anonymous throughout their participation and were not required to provide any identifying or contact information unless they wished to take part in the next phase of the



research. Responses were encrypted, and no Internet Protocol (IP) Address or geographic information was collected. I anticipated that 2SLGBTQI+ students may have had negative attitudes and experiences toward campus life, but I acknowledged that participants may have had different opinions and thoughts, so I avoided using any leading questions or guiding the participants into speaking in a direction that aligned with what I assumed. During the interview, I allowed each participant enough time and of course, their agency to share their insights and perspectives. While I took the lead, they had the chance to direct the conversation as well.

I ensured confidentiality by removing any information that could have revealed the identities of the participants or related others. Despite it is a researcher's responsibility to protect their participants from being subject to any potential harm or risks, acknowledging participants' contributions and giving them the credits based on their wishes should be a valid option, thus I used post-interview confidentiality form (see Appendix D) to let my participants decide how they wanted their data to be deal with. According to Noffke et al. (2014), the power and interpersonal complexity of the 'insider' role do not necessarily create an ethical threat. The bonds of caring, responsibility, and social commitment that connect researchers with other stakeholders may serve as a solid base for ethical decision-making (Noffke et al., 2014). Forming an atmosphere of *care* and *respect* was my priority as an ethical standard.

This methodology chapter outlines the mixed-methods approach used to explore the experiences of 2SLGBTQI+ students at UCalgary. The research collected quantitative data via an online survey to examine the demographic information and students' overall perceptions of campus inclusiveness. The qualitative data collection process was taking place concurrently through semi-structured interviews via video conferencing, providing deeper, detailed insights. I analyzed the quantitative by using descriptive and inferential statistics while applying thematic

and narrative analysis to the qualitative data. Ethical considerations were rigorously adhered to. Despite potential limitations regarding sample representativeness and the specific focus on the University of Calgary, the mixed-methods approach allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the 2SLGBTQI+ students' experiences at UCalgary.

## Chapter Four—Results

### Survey Data—Quantitative Results

#### *Demographics* (See Table 1)

The survey gathered responses from a predominantly full-time student population, with 59 participants full-time and four part-time students. In terms of academic programs, twenty-nine were enrolled as undergraduates, twenty as master's students, and eleven as PhD students, while three students were in other programs. Regarding academic standing, seventeen were identified as freshmen, twenty-two as sophomores, twelve as juniors, and five as seniors, with the remaining eight students being in their fifth year or beyond.

In terms of age, 25.4% of respondents were aged eighteen to twenty, while nearly 58% were in their twenties, and 10 students were in their thirties. Of the 62 survey participants, the majority (48) identified as Canadian, with two disclosing indigenous heritage. Fourteen participants were international students from Mexico, the United States, Pakistan, the Philippines, Iran, China, Cambodia & Vietnam, Germany, Ecuador, Turkey, and Korea.

Regarding religious affiliation, the largest group identified as non-religious, comprising forty students. Christianity was the second-largest group, with ten respondents. Eight participants indicated other religious affiliations: Catholic (3), Islam (3), former Catholic (1), Atheist (1), Pagan (1), Agnostic (1), and Secular Christianity (1).

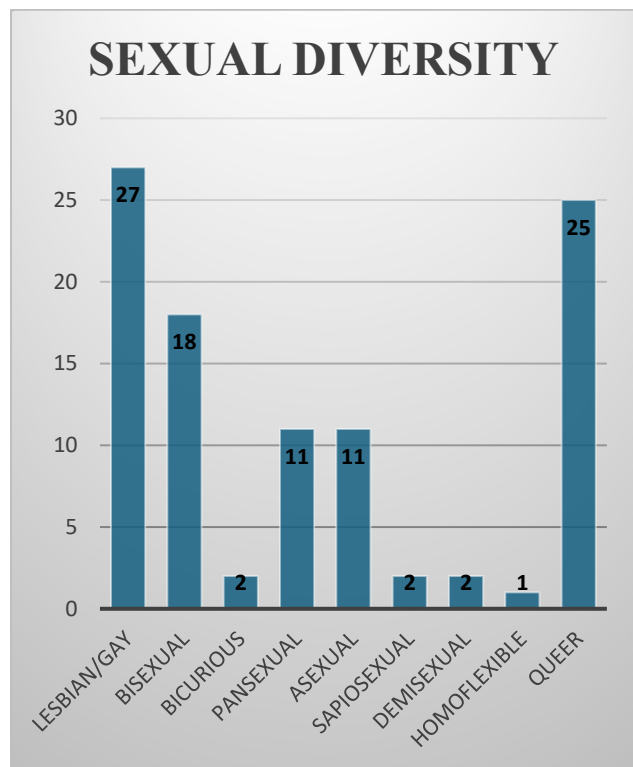
**Table 1** *Participant Demographics*

Program	Number	Year	Age	Number	Nationality	Number	Religion	Number
Undergraduate	29	1 <sup>st</sup>	20-	25.4%	Canadian	48	Non-Religious	40
Master's	20	2 <sup>nd</sup>	20+	58%	Mexican	1	Catholic	3
PhD	11	3 <sup>rd</sup>	30+	15.6%	American	1	Atheist	1
Other	3	4 <sup>th</sup>			Chinese	2	Pagan	1
Full time	59	5+			Korean	1	Agnostic	1
Part time	4				Pakistani	1	Christian	11
					Iranian (Persian)	2	Islam	3
					Turkish	1		
					German	1		
					Ecuadorian	1		
					Filipino	1		
					Chinese/Vietnamese /Cambodian	1		

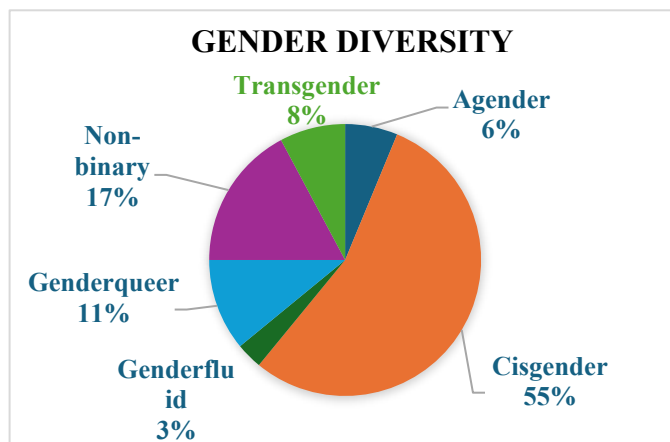
***Gender and Sexual Diversity on Campus*** (See Figure 3 & 4)

Among the 64 survey responses, less than half (35) identified as cisgender, while eleven identified as non-binary. A smaller number of respondents identified as agender (4), gender-fluid (2), genderqueer (7), or transgender (5). Notably, no respondent identified as two-spirit. Regarding sexual orientation, the most common identification was Lesbian/Gay (27), followed by queer (25), bisexual (18), asexual (11), and pansexual (11). There were also respondents identifying as bi-curious (2), sapiosexual (2), and demisexual (2), with one respondent identifying as homoflexible. The 2SLGBTQI+ student population is diverse, with individuals

expressing a wide range of gender identities and sexual orientations. It's worth noting that many students identified with multiple sexual orientations, reflecting their openness and comfort in exploring different aspects of their sexuality.



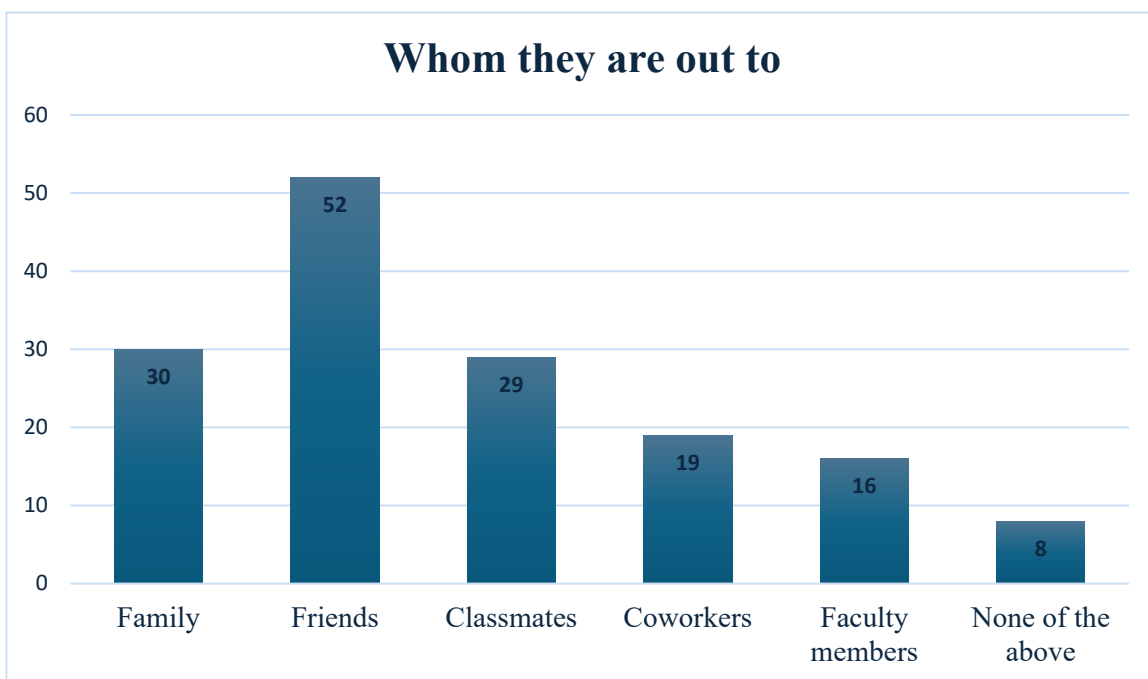
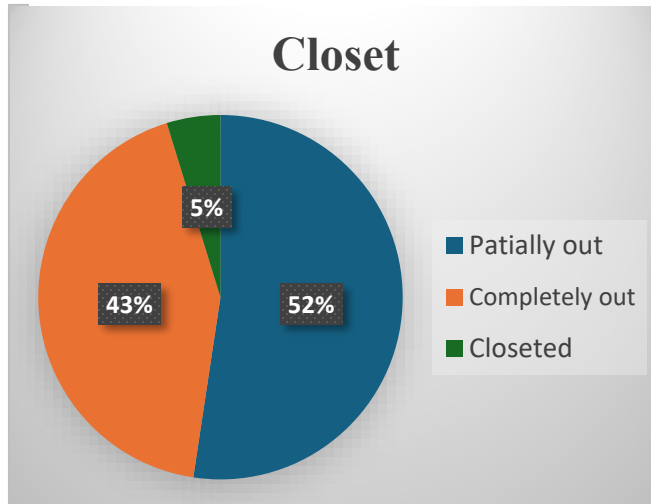
**Figure 3** *Sexual Diversity*



**Figure 2** *Gender Diversity*

### ***Closet*** (See figure 4 & 5)

Of the survey respondents, more than half (33) indicated that they were partially out of the closet, while 27 reported being completely out. Only three respondents stated they remained entirely closeted. Among those to whom participants were out, friends emerged as the primary source of support, followed closely by family and classmates. Coworkers and faculty members also played significant roles in providing support. Two respondents were out to everyone, with one saying, “very vocally out to everyone I interact with more than once”.

**Figure 4 Closet****Figure 5 Whom they are out to*****UCalgary's 2SLGBTQI+ Friendliness*** (See Figure 6)

Participants were asked to rate the University of Calgary's 2SLGBTQI+ friendliness on a scale of 1 to 10, with 53 respondents offering their ratings. Scores ranged from two highs of 10 to a low of 3, with an average rating of 7.0 points. This average rating reflects the university's overall performance, which was described by many interview participants as "OKAY/Good" in

terms of safeguarding 2SLGBTQI+ students. One respondent summarized, "The university is doing well but could still be a lot more inclusive." Another respondent noted the inclusivity of the Werklund School of Education in particular.

**Figure 6** *Ratings of UCalgary's 2SLGBTQI+ friendliness*



Despite room for improvement, the survey results suggest that the campus provided a relatively inclusive teaching and learning environment where 2SLGBTQI+ students felt comfortable being themselves and proud of their identities. This sentiment was echoed in responses to another survey question, where almost 80% of respondents expressed feeling safe, comfortable, and included on campus. Specifically, 10 students strongly agreed, while thirty-three somewhat agreed. Seven respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and only four students somewhat disagreed.

### ***Inclusive Language of Instruction***

Professors perform differently across different faculties in terms of gender-neutral and inclusive language use. Eleven respondents reported that their instructors often use them, and only one responded that they always use them. Twenty-two out of fifty-four respondents reported professors sometimes use inclusive language of instruction, whereas nineteen reported rarely,

and one reported never. One survey respondent explained the importance of using inclusive language of instruction,

When the language used in class makes me feel excluded and unseen, for instance, when an instructor has misgendered me, it is invalidating, humiliating, and traumatic. This makes it incredibly challenging to truly engage in class, to be fully present during class activities, and to focus on what my professors are saying, consequently hindering my academic success and damaging my university experience.

This is a predicament that many 2SLGBTQI+ students were forced to deal with in the classroom. On the one hand, some 2SLGBTQI+ students appreciated professors using inclusive language in their instruction. On the other hand, some professors were not willing to learn and use gender pronouns, and they found excuses to justify their decisions, such as “This is all new to me, and I am still learning about that; I do not want to make mistakes and offend anyone.” While some cisgender respondents did not particularly mention the importance of using proper gender pronouns, many believed that inclusive language of instruction plays a vital role in making an inclusive learning space for everyone. One respondent stated,

Apart from courses related to gender and sexuality studies and a few linguistic courses, I find that my instructors very rarely use LGBTQ2S+ inclusive language. I feel that in our journeys of pursuing higher education and furthering our careers, it's incredibly important that inclusive language is used so that we can feel included, heard, and seen in all our courses and our everyday interactions with instructors and peers.

Another survey respondent stated,

I think that ensuring that gender-neutral and inclusive language is used on campus, especially in classroom environments, will create safer and more inclusive spaces which



give us peace of mind knowing that we are seen and heard in order to truly succeed in our studies.

One survey respondent participant was displeased that some professors refused to respect students' pronouns in their course outlines and to use they/them pronouns for "grammatical" reasons.

### ***Gender-neutral Washrooms***

Participants expressed varied opinions regarding the preference for and introduction of gender-neutral washrooms at the University. Of the respondents, 42.6% indicated a preference for using gender-neutral washrooms, while 44.4% remained neutral on the matter. Seven out of fifty-four respondents stated they did not wish to use gender-neutral washrooms. Although most participants were aware of the existence of gender-neutral washrooms, some, particularly transgender and gender non-binary students, voiced concerns about the insufficient availability of such facilities. One respondent mentioned having to seek out specific buildings due to the scarcity of gender-neutral washrooms on campus, which made them feel uncomfortable. Another respondent wished to see more gender-neutral washrooms and change spaces in the fitness center and throughout the campus. One transgender respondent shared their unpleasant experience: "I have to walk really far to find it," another transgender student noted, "Any student could use it, and it is good for everyone." Gender-neutral washrooms were found to be disproportionately located across different campus buildings. While some cisgender students did not think it necessary to increase the number of gender-neutral bathrooms campus-wide, they all strongly supported the rights of transgender, non-binary, and gender-nonconforming students to access them. However, one participant expressed concerns about the potential misuse of gender-neutral bathrooms by a small number of individuals with ill intentions.

### *Mixed Campus Climate*

Most survey respondents (45) agreed they felt welcomed at large university events and activities. Four respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, while another four somewhat disagreed. Notably, one respondent strongly disagreed with this statement. Views were mixed when participants were asked if they found it challenging to meet and connect with like-minded students on campus. Twenty respondents somewhat agreed or somewhat disagreed, four strongly disagreed, five strongly agreed, and four neither agreed nor disagreed.

One respondent highlighted their concern, stating, “The assumption that the campus is safe for LGBTQ2S+ individuals and they are not at risk of physical harm is not good enough.” The heteronormativity still pervades campus life, which may lead to detrimental impacts on gender and sexually diverse students. Individuals whose appearances and behaviors do not meet social norms or expectations may be judged and treated unfairly. Transgender students may likely face higher risks of transphobia due to their presentation.

While blatant physical attacks and verbal abuse were rare on campus, microaggressions and subtle forms of discrimination remained prevalent. As one participant shared, “Violence is always a real threat; there is an insidious psychological harm that comes about from constantly having to monitor every interaction with others out of fear they might harm you.” The uncertainty of being treated with respect and dignity by others took a heavy toll on the well-being of 2SLGBTQI+ students. Interestingly, one survey respondent noted feeling comfortable in more conservative majors like engineering.

Cisgenderism and heteronormativity are stubbornly prevailing on campus. One survey respondent observed the gender binary belief was also dominant as if there are only "women" and "men" (e.g. when people say "he or she" or "ladies and gentlemen"), which can inadvertently

exclude people who have diverse gender identities. One survey respondent commented, “Professors, staff, and others seldom ask for pronouns; rather they prejudge a person's gender.” Another respondent said, “Unless someone takes a course specifically on gender and/or sexuality or does research in this area, there is little to no discussion of the LGBTQ+ topics anywhere, particularly in the STEM field.”

### ***Barriers and Challenges***

In academia, 2SLGBTQI+ students often hesitate to assert themselves due to the inherent power imbalance between students and instructors. Many fear that speaking out may tarnish their relationships with faculty members, potentially hindering their academic progress. One respondent highlighted a lack of seriousness regarding queer issues, while another expressed uncertainty about discussing topics such as transitioning, particularly with people who don't agree with Queer theory. Correct use of names can be particularly important for transgender students. Both survey and interview participants strongly advocate for university administrations to allow name changes across all platforms of university services, including email addresses and online learning systems, to ensure inclusivity and respect for individuals' identities.

According to survey responses, mental health services tailored to the 2SLGBTQI+ community are insufficient, particularly concerning issues such as staying closeted, experiencing sexual violence, and feeling alienated. Besides, existing mental health providers often lack the expertise to adequately address these specific concerns. Furthermore, inadequate knowledge and awareness about inclusive language among students and professors persist despite available workshops and training sessions. One survey respondent pointed out that relying on the 2SLGBTQI+ community to identify gaps and provide support would place emotional labor on them. Additionally, “resistance to introducing gender pronouns perpetuates exclusionary

environments”, as expressed by one respondent feeling marginalized by outdated language usage. Some survey respondents also reported a pervasive sense of not belonging within their faculty and encountering anti-inclusive language, with little regard for safety issues specific to queerness and transness from leadership.

Coming out is a complex journey for 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, often with fears of losing friends and encountering heteronormativity, both on and off campus. Revealing one's 2SLGBTQI+ identity to colleagues could pose challenges, as individuals must assess the safety of disclosing personal information to ensure respectful and supportive reactions. Moreover, for transgender individuals, the use of legal names in academic and online spaces, known as deadnaming, can be deeply distressing and invasive. Correcting this often requires repeatedly outing oneself to professors and navigating bureaucracies, such as changing legal names, which can be daunting and stressful.

### *Spaces*

Of the total 54 responses, 37 wished that more student areas on campus be permanently designated as safe spaces for 2SLGBTQI+ students. Eleven respondents neither supported nor disagreed with this idea. A small number of students (2 strongly, 4 somewhat) disagreed, arguing that “segregating 2SLGBTQI+ students from their heterosexual peers is another form of discrimination and would not help to make the whole community as welcoming and inclusive as it should be.”

Due to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic and campus regulations, many social events transferred to online platforms; however, as time passed, people developed “virtual fatigue,” and many preferred attending in-person events. Unfortunately, the temporary closure of the Q Centre left nowhere for 2SLGBTQI+ students to meet and get connected for an extended period. Many

undergraduate students appreciated the existence of the Q Centre, located in MacEwan Student Hall, which provided a safe and inclusive space for 2SLGBTQI+ students to socialize and share their experiences. One survey participant proposed that the University of Calgary offer more 2SLGBTQI+- themed events organized by staff. They said,

The LGBTQ+ clubs on campus try their best, but I believe that more students would attend these events if the University of Calgary offered them. It becomes a burden for one or two university clubs to plan and execute all events for the LGBTQ+ community with limited to no funding and no paid staff.

Another respondent said many students would want to attend these events, yet there was hardly enough time for student volunteers to organize events and support all students. Some survey participants found it hard to find other like-minded people because the 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus were not “the most well-promoted.”

Additionally, students at different life stages may have different perspectives on where and with whom to connect. One survey respondent said,

As a grad student, I do not feel welcomed in the Q Space because it is for undergrads. There isn't an equivalent space for grad students, and I feel left behind in connecting with other students who are similar to me.

### ***Missing Representation in Curricula and Coursework***

The overwhelming majority of responses (74%) underscored the lack of representation of 2SLGBTQI+ people and characters in materials and curricula outside of gender and sexuality studies courses. One respondent noted, “There’s also not really any LGBTQ+ people we’re learning about yet, although I haven’t been here very long”, one survey respondent said. Another survey respondent elaborated on this issue,

Since LGBTQ+ perspectives are not often included in coursework, many students don't know or understand what it is like to be LGBTQ+ in Alberta. The current political wind under the governance of the United Conservative Progressive Party is certainly not blowing towards gender and sexually diverse people, which has been very damaging to the well-being of their community. It would be nice to see our community represented more fully at UCalgary.

One participant highlighted the reluctance of instructors to discuss 2SLGBTQI+ topics, noting their visible discomfort and avoidance of such topics due to fear of “getting it wrong”. This participant further pointed out that the unwillingness to engage in these issues not only disadvantages themselves and 2SLGBTQI+ students but also impacts their future clients and patients who may also be 2SLGBTQI+.

Another respondent expressed their wish for more discussion and interest in 2SLGBTQI+ issues outside of feminist and gender studies classes. They said, “It should be a requirement and not a niche form of study because that differentiates us from everyone else; it is another type of ‘othering’.” While acknowledging the significance of feminist and gender studies, they thought other faculties needed to “collaborate and understand the importance of understanding gender and sexuality and how immersive LGBTQ+ experiences and knowledge are all over.”

### ***Actions and changes toward inclusion***

A survey respondent suggested that faculty members and other UCalgary employees should constantly undergo mandatory training and workshops, such as “inclusivity and gender and sexuality-101”. Another respondent emphasized the need for more opportunities for faculty members to learn about pressing issues facing 2SLGBTQI+ students. They advocated for administrators to collaborate with faculty across different fields to provide 2SLGBTQI+-specific

mental health support. Additionally, instructors and professors were encouraged to make a more conscious effort to highlight 2SLGBTQI+ issues and contributions in class.

Another suggestion was to implement a policy that “prohibits professors from making discrimination part of their course outline and ensures a baseline of respect.” Another survey respondent proposed opening more discussions “as professionals on how to debate healthily on topics such as gender identity and how to support the trans community.” One respondent suggested understanding and recognizing various sexual and gender identities, saying, “Using name and pronouns is a good start”.

### ***Performative Allyship and Advocacy***

One survey respondent said that “unless the staff or other person you are talking to is queer, they don’t understand or care about your experiences. They might be sympathetic to your struggles, but they won’t fight for you.” Hire more faculty and university admin that are LGBTQ.” There was a call for more funding and publicity for the Q center, as well as more publicity for their events. “Use inclusive language, not assume anyone’s gender or sexuality”. Another respondent wished to convene with faculty and admins as a group to raise concerns or share stories, highlighting the importance of such meetings occurring across the institution, not solely within dedicated committees. Another survey respondent said, “Usually, once a conversation can begin, the situation improves.”

Many survey respondents hoped for increased 2SLGBTQI+ faculty members and 2SLGBTQI+-themed events on campus. As one survey respondent noted, “The presence of these faculty members could give students someone to talk about matters that relate to the LGBTQ+ community.” This respondent also endorsed the idea of organizing 2SLGBTQI+ events such as movie nights and creating social and sports clubs/groups like hiking and swimming, etc., saying,

“especially for those of them who are not as connected to the community outside of school.”

Furthermore, they advocated for more emergency funding for 2SLGBTQI+ students “who get kicked out of their homes or have high financial burdens.” Although this survey respondent said they were fortunate not to have encountered this hardship, they knew several people who could have used the support.

One survey respondent highlighted the importance of professors addressing microaggressions, such as intentional misuse of gender pronouns. They observed an incident where a fellow student misused a pronoun, which was brushed off as a joke, leaving them feeling uncomfortable. They believed that proper intervention by the professor could have made a significant difference in addressing such intolerance. Another respondent pointed out the dilemma faced by 2SLGBTQI+ students, who often find themselves torn between defending their rights and silencing their voices, stating, “They are sometimes accused of being too sensitive, causing drama and tension when they stand up and speak for themselves.” This pressure can sometimes lead 2SLGBTQI+ students to feel compelled to downplay their identities and suppress their voices to avoid conflict.

The University of Calgary should take every opportunity to send clear messages that the campus is an inclusive space for all, regardless of people’s gender and sexual orientation. As one survey respondent believed, “messaging could be improved to let UCalgary queer students know they may come as they are to any event, and they will be welcomed.”

One survey respondent proposed that professors should receive education on the intersectional issues that 2SLGBTQI+ students and faculty face. They need to be informed on issues that affect gender and sexually diverse students. “Gender and sexually diverse students are



eager to be heard,” as one survey respondent called on people to hear their voices. “Listen to us when we do speak up and feel safe to, even if we don’t feel safe to as well.”

“It would be helpful if the University of Calgary could offer a short mandatory presentation for faculty and staff to attend regarding gender and sexual diversity”. This survey respondent supposed that “if staff and faculty were reminded about gender pronouns and sexuality, they would be more sensitive to assuming a student’s/ anyone’s gender or sexuality”. Professors and instructors should maintain an open-minded approach, recognizing the presence of members from the queer community. Even though they assume otherwise, professors and instructors ought to use inclusive language and teaching materials. It is important to make 2SLGBTQI+ training part of all staff’s mandatory compliance and safety and health courses.

### **Interview Data—Qualitative Results**

It was a great fortune and honor to have meaningful dialogues with my research participants about their experiences on campus as 2SLGBTQI+ students. They hoped to see more positive changes taking place so that the University of Calgary could become more inclusive, diverse, and 2SLGBTQI+ friendlier for gender and sexual minority students. I would like to invite my thesis readers to delve into their unique stories and hear their genuine voices.

Amy, who identifies as agender, asexual, or aromantic, had both online and in-person learning experiences while pursuing their study programs at the University of Calgary. They thought the university felt very diverse and inclusive, especially in the faculty of Education. Drawing from their own experiences of the courses they took that were not specifically gender- and sexuality-related, they said the 2SLGBTQI+ issues were included appropriately in the classroom discussion. There was a great focus on gender studies and queer inclusivity. Their professors also covered topics such as asexuality and two-spiritedness, which made the learning

as inclusive as it could be. Amy's face lightened up when they talked about how great their current classmates and instructors are in respecting their 2SLGBTQI+ identity.

Things may turn ugly under the beautiful surface. Amy said they had had some unpleasant experiences with their peer students, instructors, and people invited into the program. For instance, their choice of name and gender pronouns were ignored. Amy also noted that although they tried to raise this issue, people were unwilling to face it. Amy said, "They would not be in a position to put their energy into educating people who would not make any changes." They had mixed feelings about their interactions with their course instructors.

Amy wished they knew how to report at that time when their classmates—a group of professionals working in the field of education in Calgary—made fun of them. Amy was targeted because of the way they look and their advocacy for 2SLGBTQI+ education. Those classmates made disrespectful comments in a private social media group chat about Amy, "they just want to draw attention to themselves", and "Can't they just calm down?" Amy found this disturbing truth because one of their friends happened to be a member of that private chat group. Amy's friend felt the urge to tell Amy not to work with these people ever again. Despite their friend's willingness to report the incident, Amy feared potential bullying and retaliation. Amy described this experience as daunting because this group of people are adults who will likely take administration positions at school boards.

Ironically, it is the same group of people who explicitly expressed their allyship to the 2SLGBTQI+ community in front of everyone in the class, but quite the opposite, they belittle people with intolerant comments who are not from the "mainstream". Another shocking fact is that these "bullies" were women, who are traditionally believed to hold more accepting and

progressive attitudes towards gender and sexually diverse people. Amy would want these “bullies” to know how they would respond,

What you think echoes your actions; people in the queer community can see and know who their authentic allies are. There are ways to be kind and treat people with respect even if you do not necessarily support a specific community.

Amy’s words prove that true allies can be recognized through consistent, respectful actions. Even without full support of a community, one can still treat others with kindness and respect. Amy thought it was very disappointing that these classmates, who were supposed to learn how to create safe and inclusive spaces, contributed to toxic environments without recognizing they were the actual perpetrators. Amy said they would go through the proper channels to report the incident, and these people should receive academic consequences for what they were doing if it were to happen again.

Amy could not make further comments about the campus climate outside the classroom due to their rare physical presence on campus. Still, they mentioned they were aware of the support resources such as the Q Centre and the GSA2. While Amy thinks that the university is doing a good job, there is a lack of funding specific to queer diversity, and the 2SLGBTQI+ topics are not predominantly featured in the university mandates. Amy expressed that although the undercurrent homophobia and heteronormativity are there, they are not overtly on campus or within their classroom. They think that the campus is more inclusive and liberal than the city of Calgary as a whole, and it is generally a safe space for 2SLGBTQI+ students with perhaps some differences across different departments.

Amy thinks that Higher Education could hopefully increase the visibility and normalize 2SLGBTQI+ people in academic and professional settings, making its way out to influence the

broader society's understanding of 2SLGBTQI+ people. Amy wished that there could be more 2SLGBTQI+ people who have the courage to "be out and visible, and to feel comfortable within the university, not think it is going to hold implications for their career." Amy stressed that it is important that all University employees engage in mandatory and ongoing queer-inclusive development. To foster a more inclusive online classroom experience, one of the practices would be including gender pronouns in one's introduction or username displayed on the screen. Amy also believed that the University of Calgary should make it an official policy for the instructors to make it clear in the course outlines that any form of discrimination based on people's gender and sexuality will not be tolerated.

Ariel, who identifies as agender and asexual/aromantic, described her general university lived experiences as being interesting. While she noted that there had not been overt or explicit violence directed at her, microaggressions are common, and discriminations are in subtle forms. She thinks that heteronormativity and cisnormativity still dominate the campus. Ariel thought that the university was doing the "bare minimum" in terms of supporting the 2SLGBTQI+ community. She said, "There is progress for sure, and there will continue to be progress, which is good." Yet she thought there was still room for improvement, saying, "It is just lip service; they say these things, but sometimes it does not translate into the students' experiences." As a very unfrontational person, she felt reluctant to bring issues to the table because the nature of the power dynamics with professors would make it extra difficult. All the cohort in her master's program identified as cisgender and heterosexual, which made Ariel feel like a lone wolf herself. She was worried that coming out would change their opinions about her and affect their friendship. She did not want to be isolated and excluded for "calling people out."

The program she was in has been pretty good, as she believed it was social justice oriented. For example, gender pronouns were included and shared in the course outlines, introductions, and presentations. 2SLGBTQI+-related discussions were actively included in some classes. However, there were also unpleasant instances. When she told people that she was not interested in relationships, professors commented, “Oh, you say that now, but just wait till you get older.” “You have issues, get some counseling, and you will get over it.” She thinks these experiences were dismissive and signified a total lack of awareness and understanding of asexuality. Ariel explained, “I am choosing not to have a partner, and it is not going to change, and it should not be thought of as something that will affect my work.” That is what Ariel would have wanted those professors to know. She would appreciate a sincere apology that validates her identity, and that professor could realize what they said was hurtful.

Ariel had very mixed feelings about a practicum she participated in that was affiliated with the University of Calgary. She mentioned that half of the staff were very open about using pronouns and approached their clients respectfully. Nevertheless, there was also a lot of misgendering by another half, which was concerning and made her uncomfortable. She gave an example, one of her colleagues said, “I am not used to using they to refer to one person; I am used to they being like a plural thing, so I am going to mess up; sorry in advance.” Ariel also pointed out that some professors and practitioners, especially those who are experts in their fields, do not really understand how harmful it can be to use the wrong pronouns. She gave an example of how the situation was dealt with poorly, “For our conversations, I am just going to refer to you as these pronouns, not your actual pronouns.” Ariel remembered encountering a professor who disagreed with her views and writings about gender development, as she recounted, “My professor was like, I don’t think you understand gender development. When I

did the presentation on it, she was really trying to argue that biological basis for gender.”

Fortunately, she received support from her colleagues in their afterward conversations.

Ariel felt disappointed that the 2SLGBTQI+-related issues had been politicized and the university had been hesitant to take an explicitly supportive stance. She reckoned that the use of gender pronouns and diverse gender identities should be normalized on campus. Also, she wanted to see more designated spaces for the 2SLGBTQI+ community and more gender-neutral bathrooms on campus. She would like more gender options to be included in those entry or application forms. “These little things and changes could make such a difference.” Ariel said that she would be thrilled to see more inclusion of 2SLGBTQI+-related content in the curriculum in every field because “there will be a lot less chance for causing people harm.”

Ariel thought that the spaces for 2SLGBTQI+ students on the main campus were limited and the mainstream heteronormative and CIS normative culture was dominating campus. She thought that the campus is relatively welcoming for gender and sexually diverse students. However, Ariel mentioned there was this “I don’t want to get involved” culture, which in a way could still make some 2SLGBTQI+ folks targets of harassment and discrimination because “the perpetrators know they could get away with it.”

Regarding on-campus resources and support services for 2SLGBTQI+ students, Ariel volunteered for the GSA2. She said she may be biased, but she believed that it was doing great, for instance, making its events comfortable and welcoming for everybody, trying to be aware of the 2SLGBTQI+ issues going on, and striving to make inviting space for advocacy and justice. She also said that she knows about QOC, WRC, and the Wellness Centre. She worked with the WSC and thought it was fantastic and open, willing to adapt and change to be considerate of diverse identities. She spoke highly of the WSC’s well-prepared peer support program. “It is

knowledgeable about LGBTQ2S+ folks and experiences services, which is helpful and important.” She also disclosed that there was much learning taking place at the Wellness Centre when she worked there. Based on Ariel’s own experiences, these support programs have been doing well and are non-judgmental and welcoming.

Ariel felt it relatively easy to connect with like-minded folks on campus, and she did not necessarily struggle to connect with people and groups, though she mentioned being surrounded by the straight majority in her department was a barrier at times. Her lived experiences as an asexual student on campus impacted her emotionally. She thought that there was a lot of avoidance of 2SLGBTQI+ topics, and she hoped to see more education, knowledge, and open conversations. Ariel would like to see more 2SLGBTQI+ representation in higher education, such as students, faculty members, and other professionals in the field. She said, “It will be hugely beneficial for the gender and sexually diverse community, for the society, and for the upcoming generation.” She wished that higher education could develop more services and programs that are relevant to people and help people. She particularly proposed providing more funding and opportunities to the 2SLGBTQI+ community.

At the very end of our conversation, Ariel made the following remark on asexuality, Asexuality is not being anti-sex. Asexual folks are not weird, broken, damaged, or immature. We just need to be open-minded to infinite ways of existing. There are so many relationships we are going to have in our lives. They are all important, and we should nurture all of them.

Ariel emphasized the importance of understanding and validating the asexual identity, countering common misconceptions that may associate asexuality with being anti-sex or emotionally

underdeveloped. Their words advocate for broader acceptance of diverse relationship structures and highlight the value of all types of connections, whether romantic, platonic, or otherwise.

Jasmine was a cisgender student who identified as queer and asexual. “I’ve never had a crush or felt attraction to anyone in my life, and the reason I say I’m queer is that I’m open to experiencing it in the future.” Jasmine said her campus life was “pretty easy and really positive” because “I can mask myself as somebody who is straight, and people usually think I’m either straight or bi, so I get around easily.” Jasmine did not experience any outward discrimination, yet she had to deal with people’s assumptions about her significant other and other things that were not really related to her sexuality because of the way she presented herself. Jasmine thought that one’s outer looks play a huge role in people’s experiences regardless of their gender and sexual identity. “The first thing that you judge someone by is their appearance, the way they talk, and the way they act.” Jasmine was very open about her sexuality to all her friends, and they respected that she was ace. Jasmine thought the campus seemed like a very open environment, but acknowledged that the experience may be different for other 2SLGBTQI+ students, “I can’t speak for like very visible minorities though, such as trans people, I’m sure they experience very different kinds of discrimination, but for me, it’s been very positive, and the same thing goes to the LGBTQ2S+ people who I know who are mainly bisexual.”

Jasmine was studying science, and she thought that classroom discussions related to 2SLGBTQI+ issues were not relevant to her specialization. Jasmine agreed that course materials and curricula should include 2SLGBTQI+ related content, people, or characters as she said, “it would definitely help educate some people about different gender and sexual minorities.” Jasmine overserved the dominant use of gender binary languages and hoped this practice would change. “It’s just something you internalize like you’re going to use very binary and



heteronormative language in the sciences and I kind of wish that would change, but at the same time, I don't really expect it to just because it's so deeply entrenched in our literature and our academic writing.”

Jasmine thought having a good support system in and outside her class was very conducive to her studies. She was achieving academic excellence, saying, “I think a huge part is owed to me feeling welcome and safe in my environment. That's definitely a big part of your academic performance, [which] is feeling as though you can be yourself without being discriminated against.” She did not recall experiencing anything negative on campus. Jasmine was involved with the GSA<sup>2</sup> of GSA and the Rainbow Residence Council. She thought the 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus were doing good work and she said, “I think it's good that they're spreading valuable information both to create new allies and to make queer people feel welcome on campus.” She added that having different queer-friendly organizations on campus could facilitate a safer environment for queer people to live and study in. Jasmine thought the campus was very safe for gender and sexually diverse students because she had not experienced harassment or heard of any cases of discrimination.

When Jasmine came to UCalgary, she was completely new to Calgary and living independently. She thought those welcome events were helpful and felt welcomed in the organizations she joined. “I think just like making people feel as though they're part of the community is really important for their mental health well-being.” Jasmine found it easy to gain access to 2SLGBTQI+ resources, and she did not use any healthcare services on campus. In the survey, Jasmine was among the only two respondents to rate 10 out of 10 on UCalgary's 2SLGBTQI+ friendliness, and she was indeed very satisfied with the quality of her university

life. Jasmine noted that her experience was limited because she could “blend in with straight people pretty well.”

Jasmine did not think that higher education would differ or mean anything particular for people of diverse backgrounds. She thought that the university was already doing its best to address the needs of gender and sexual minorities. However, she also said, “If you’re feeling discriminated against, and it’s not a safe place for you, then obviously people are not going to perform well in higher education.” Jasmine somewhat disagreed that UCalgary should employ more full-time staff to 2SLGBTQI+ plus groups and events. Her explanation was that more opportunities should be reserved for students, particularly 2SLGBTQI+ students, in a way that empowers queer students who are very passionate about the community. She did not think it necessary to employ full-time staff but thought it would be great to create more programs for queer people. Jasmine believed that it would be helpful to require the professor to respect students’ names and encourage the students to include gender pronouns in their introductions. Jasmine was used to and maintained a neutral attitude about the heteronormative culture dominating the field of science, but she thought that people who experience strong gender dysphoria would feel uncomfortable in a program where the language is all binary and heteronormative. Jasmine was personally satisfied with the university’s performance in terms of supporting 2SLGBTQI+ students but acknowledged that there may be gaps in meeting their needs and challenges facing gender and sexual minority students.

Jasmine made the following comment when she was talking about aromanticism, “Aromanticism is when you don’t experience romantic attraction to someone. And asexuality is [when] you don’t experience sexual attraction to someone. I believe sexuality is fluid [and] some people develop new attractions as they go along their lives.” Jasmine provided a clear distinction

between aromanticism and asexuality, two often misunderstood and conflated identities. Her perspective encourages an understanding that sexual and romantic orientations are not fixed but can change and evolve over time, reflecting the diversity and complexity of human experiences.

Irene is a queer student at UCalgary who identified herself as between cisgender female and non-binary. She said in the survey, “I’m out with my gender identity to everyone but my family and I’m out to anyone as queer.” Irene felt a great disparity between her expectations for the diversity of people’s identities and the reality she found. She gave an example that there was no literature written by women or people of other different gender identities unless one takes feminist or sexuality courses. She shared her frustration about the lack of diversity,

I noticed the same thing with non-white explorations of different nationalities; I didn’t find there was a lot of that; it seemed very white cis-normative, and I felt that it was disappointing for me. I think that all the time; it really angers and upsets me. Even though I’m a white person, it always bothers me that our education system is so limited, even though we’re in higher education, and we’re paying for this education.

Irene boldly criticized the lack of diversity in educational content, particularly the dominance of white cis-normative discourse. Despite being white herself, she was frustrated by the limited representation of non-white experiences in higher education, calling for a more inclusive curriculum.

Irene used to be the president of a society linked to a department. She once reached out to the head of her department about why they did not have more queer-cinema or women directors’ classes. The reply she received was, “People weren’t interested in Women’s cinema”. She added, “A lot of my friends who have graduated were really disappointed that they didn’t get more diversity in their course, and they’re also part of the queer community.” Irene was leaving her

field as she said, “I don’t feel like it suits what I thought it would be, which in a large way is not a very inclusive space, unfortunately.”

Irene was hoping to see a real push for social justice by changing the next generation of filmmakers, but she said her department did not properly address or acknowledge these issues.

She thought that the problem was rooted in how people are educated. She commented,

Even if they don’t say that women, people of other genders, and other radicalized people’s experiences, they’re not saying that they don’t matter, but by not teaching them, they’re insinuating that they’re not as important or they don’t even exist. We must go out of our own way to educate ourselves, which defeats the purpose of even paying for our education, so it’s very frustrating.

Irene’s comments highlighted the exclusion of marginalized groups in education undermines the value of formal education.

In the survey, Irene indicated that professors often made assumptions and sometimes used inclusive language of instruction. She said, “I think a lot of professors have good intentions, but they don’t consistently use communication that indicates what they really know when they’re talking about certain gender things.” Irene observed “small assumptions that aren’t necessarily true for everyone” and said it happened frequently in philosophy classes. She described, “It’s making a lot of assertions, specially making people equivalent to man.” She added, “That maybe goes beyond just our university and more of an issue within philosophy itself, but the distinctions sometimes feel really exclusory.” Irene also noticed that professors had been making progress regarding pronoun use. She said, “It does create an opportunity for people to normalize it, and I think it makes other people also consider that gender isn’t binary. Just the fact that we’re acknowledging it makes it a huge step.”

From her own experience, Irene thought the campus climate was safe and inclusive for gender and sexually diverse students, and she had not witnessed or experienced any harassment or discriminatory incident. Irene did not access a lot of resources specifically relating to her gender or sexuality. However, she wished there was a little more information about 2SLGBTQI+ resources, as she said, “I think I have a hard time knowing what they all are.” She wished that the Q Centre had been open, and it could organize more events. Irene found that the Wellness Centre was an open environment, though she had a very unpleasant experience with a psychiatrist, which was not related to their gender and sexuality. Irene wanted to get more involved with the 2SLGBTQI+ groups and thought their work was great. Irene believed that higher education opened different doors for her. “It does give me more credibility that I wouldn’t have, although I don’t like that I have to pursue all of this education just to be considered credible or worth listening to.”

Irene thought that 2SLGBTQI+ students are more vulnerable to other stressors and trauma. She explained, “Sometimes, the way that the university is set up as such a bureaucracy, a lot of us are neurodivergent. So, it can be really hard to navigate and just really exhausting.” Irene proposed educating professors on the intersectional issues 2SLGBTQI+ students and faculty face. She thought that professors should be required to inform themselves about issues that affect 2SLGBTQI+ students and attempt to make strides to understand how social infrastructure affects us in teaching and outside the classroom.”

### ***More than One Sexual Orientation***

“I was always like this; nothing changes; it’s more like I acknowledge who I am; I have been this way all the whole time.” –Angelo

Angelo was a cisgender male student who identified as bisexual, bi-curious, and pansexual. From his candid perspective, his campus life as a sexual minority individual was tough. He found it hard to visit more 2SLGBTQI+ spaces, as he said, “I don’t feel that I belong there; I’ve had this thought like, you are not gay enough.” He also felt the pressure within the broader community to be quiet about his sexual identity and thus has not told anyone yet. He made a general comment that there were a lot of bisexual people in the closet compared with people who identify as other sexualities. While he said he knew the existence of those spaces for 2SLGBTQI+ students, he could not seem to find the courage to engage with or access them. About this, he said, “It is tough that I cannot be as open about it as I [would] like to be.” Angelo recalled his experience of coming out to himself: He resisted the fact that he was bisexual.

When asked about his lived experience on campus, Angelo said the following: “I would not say my campus experience is bad or good; it is just I don’t have any [experiences] regarding my sexuality.” He was not comfortable sharing with people about his sexuality because he had concerns about how people would react if he was more open about his sexual orientation, including going to places such as the Q Centre. Although he repeatedly stressed that he has not encountered any issues, he chose to keep his sexual orientation to himself: “As somebody who wants to stay pretty anonymous, I don’t really want to broadcast myself to the people.” One of the biggest obstacles for him to be open is that he did not want people’s attitudes and perceptions about him to change if he revealed his hidden sexual identity. His comment about this was, “I did not want people to assume that being LGBTQ is all of my identity; I don’t like labeling, and I am complex.” He also had concerns that coming out would negatively affect his relationships with people in his social and academic circles.

When asked about his experiences with the inclusion or exclusion of 2SLGBTQI+-related discussions in the classroom, Angelo remembered one of the courses he took started to plant the seeds in his heart and made him more open about his sexuality. He thought the classes had been excellent and quite sensitive. He supposed that one of the classes was taught by someone from the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Angelo thought the professor did a decent job of “portraying how the LGBTQ community was and how they were portrayed in media” through his fair and balanced teaching. “I learned a lot that I didn’t already know, definitely dispelling all the stereotypes and misconceptions people had about [2SLGBTQI+ topics].” He noticed that other students seemed to respect how this instructor approached this topic.

In the survey, Angelo indicated that professors never make assumptions but rarely use inclusive language. Below is his explanation of this contradiction,

A lot of the time, they don’t really want to get into that rabbit hole. Maybe they are afraid of authentic people. They might not feel they have the knowledge on how to really deal with gender and sexual minorities. When it’s part of the course, they handled it really well. They were sensitive and inclusive. But they don’t acknowledge it at all; they try not to. I can understand coz it’s difficult to just add information that was not necessary. They should technically deal with all kinds of people. It’s hard; the professors who had experiences with gender and sexual minorities in teaching, learning, and making courses do it respectfully. But I feel like the other professors try to do it respectfully but not doing anything about it.

Angelo’s observation depicted the delima when some professors and instructors tried to address gender and sexual minority issues, possibly due to discomfort or lack of knowledge. While those

with experience handle these topics sensitively, others may choose not to engage at all, which is a missed opportunity for inclusive education.

Angelo thought the University was doing a great job in terms of supporting gender and sexual minority students. He said he was aware of gender-neutral washrooms and the hotline specifically for gender and sexual minorities. However, he could not comment on the quality of these services because he had not used them. He thought that the closure of the Q Centre during the first two years of the pandemic was unfortunate. Angelo believed that the university was the best place to learn and meet with different people with different perspectives. Angelo appreciated it when professors caught themselves using improper language. For example, in one of the courses that did not focus on gender and sexuality, the professor said, “If you are a girl, sorry, if you identify as a girl.” This experience was surprising and pleasant for him. He further stated that some professors were aware of the issue and tried to deal with the topic properly and sensitively. Nevertheless, the real concern is “Being accepting isn’t just not (being not) accepting.” Angelo’s remark captured his personal experiences.

Regarding the 2SLGBTQI+ content and characters in the curriculum, Angelo shared that there was no involvement in many courses he had taken as “it doesn’t make sense to put it, and I took a lot of science courses.” However, he also thought that these issues were handled well when they came up. Angelo did not know his peers’ perceptions and attitudes about 2SLGBTQI+ people. Angelo said, “They don’t talk about it at all; I don’t know if it’s that they don’t like them, or they don’t know how to deal with them, or they just don’t care.” Angelo said that is a big factor in how he is because they do not really talk about it. Although he doubted that they would really care that much about his sexuality, there is a lot of uncertainty about their real thoughts.



Angelo thought the campus climate towards the 2SLGBTQI+ community was open, and his limited experiences had been relatively positive. Angelo shared his conflicting and contradictory views about people's open-mindedness. He was not certain if the people surrounding him were genuinely nice or if they seemed to be friendly because they assumed he was not a sexual minority. He commented, "If everyone knew from the start that I am a minority, they would probably treat me differently. I don't talk about it or do things to suggest I am." When asked if religious affiliation had any influence on Angelo's sexuality exploration journey, he answered, "I know I'm Catholic. I know I'll be fine. I know I'm not going to hell. I won't let people use that against me."

Angelo said that he did not know too much about support programs and groups for gender and sexually diverse students, and he had never used them. As he said, "I know they exist, and I know they are not intentionally hiding it from people, and they are going out of their way to let people know." However, he admitted that his judgment was based on what he had seen, not what he had experienced. When I told Angelo that QOC had an active and relatively large community on Discord, he said that he would want anonymous groups like this. Angelo had never witnessed or encountered harassment or discriminatory incidents of any kind outside the classroom. He also thought the campus was safe for gender and sexually diverse students and said that people in postsecondary institutions are a lot more open, yet he also admitted that his observation may not reflect the reality facing other 2SLGBTQI+ students. Angelo said he had his support networks of family and friends, so he did not need to seek any resources, "I'm not relying on the university as my only source of support in this." Regarding the changes needed to better support 2SLGBTQI+ students, Angelo suggested acknowledging gender and sexually diverse students, similar to the land acknowledgment,

making it more open to people, which would be a step in the right direction. Angelo elaborated, “They always mention mental health, First Nations, and territory, I guess they could acknowledge that there are people like me. It’s just a small step, but at the same time it brings it to the front.” Angelo shared that he was a big fan of gender-neutral washrooms because of the added privacy. He said, “I can see that it’s a lot more effective than a male restroom, a female restroom because making it gender-neutral means everybody’s going there, and everyone’s privacy is actually a lot more acknowledged.”

Daniel, a cisgender gay student in a master’s program who pursued multiple courses and programs at the University of Calgary, described that his campus (Foothills) experience had been overall positive from the perspective of his sexual orientation. He has made connections with peers and professors who are part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, creating that space for gender and sexual diversity and other intersections around race and ability. Daniel’s perception of campus climate towards gender and sexually diverse community is inclusive. He said, “It’s working its way towards being sort of barrier-free or completely inclusive.” His program was very intense and did not have a huge social component, so he did not experience any barrier or any kind of assumptions of heteronormativity and cisgender normativity. He recalled a mandatory training for graduate students about the ideas of sex and gender in research. He appreciated that the university is taking steps as he shared, “It’s a federal training program, it’s free, easy to access, and mandatory” regardless of what specialization the student is in.

One of the tasks to complete in Daniel’s acceptance package was the sex and gender training. He noted, “Before even I step foot in the classroom before I meet any of my peers or professors, I knew that the university was taking it seriously enough to tell everyone that sex and gender matters.” He has not observed anything either overtly welcoming or alienating, a balance

that worked for him, but he did not know whether other members of the 2SLGBTQI+ community were looking for more or not. Daniel thought that the professors had always been open to discussions on relevant issues in the classroom environments. He said, “There were a few studies we do in class, and I was like, the authors are confusing sex and gender; That’s a problem, and they were open to hearing that.” He also felt free to talk about his sexuality with his peers. When Daniel told some folks he has a partner who works in another department, they could pick up the cue, realize what that means, and acknowledge that. Below are his feelings:

Most of them have been pretty polite, and they avoided terms like girlfriend or boyfriend.

They were using neutral language, and they do want to know more [about my partner].

There’s that balance. They don’t want to be offensive, and at the same time, they aren’t fully comfortable with the language, but I appreciate that it’s definitely on their mind, and they are trying.

Daniel did not think that relevant issues and topics had been avoided in the classroom, but they were not purposely included either. He further elaborated that there was a lot of content purposely included around sex and gender, but not that much around the 2SLGBTQI+ community. One of Daniel’s colleagues who identifies as cisgender was researching transgender individuals, which he thought was excellent and needs to be investigated respectfully. Daniel said it showed the actual allyship, and he commented about this colleague, “This is someone I can feel really comfortable with, and this is someone who knows more than I do about the transgender community.”

Daniel thought that using proper gender pronouns was still a new and emerging practice, which he called “a work in progress.” He also shared that he very intentionally uses terms like “folks” and “y’all” because he wants to support people in his life who are not comfortable with

words such as the most used “guys.” Daniel acknowledged the usual questioning surrounding religious individuals and expressed his perspectives based on his interactions with his religious peers:

There is always that trepidation. I don't want to offend them in any way, and I want them to be free, to be themselves the way I want to be [myself]. My [sexual] orientation and their religion don't need to come up because it's not really relevant. I think if it ever did, we've negotiated a foundation for the relationship for it to be respectful, where I hope they don't feel uncomfortable with me the same way I don't want to feel uncomfortable around them.

Daniel expressed his desire for mutual respect in peer relationships and stressed the importance of creating a foundation where both parties can feel comfortable being themselves.

Daniel was grateful that people in his program were welcoming and accepting, and they were willing to learn as he said, “My [sexual] orientation isn't a barrier to those connections, right? No one's uncomfortable.” Daniel was able to make connections and build relationships with his peers whom he could reach for help. He reflected on whether his lived experiences would impact his educational performance, “If there were those microaggressions and implicit or explicit biases, it would be much harder to connect with my peers. And I know my academic performance would suffer.”

Daniel personally found the Foothills campus very safe for gender and sexually diverse students. He thought that his cisgender male identity, training in martial arts, and self-defence gave him that sense of safety. However, he said he could see how dangerous it would be for others. Daniel said there was an active construction site with many hypermasculine men walking around and on the bus. He said, “If you are gender fluid or transgender, there's the fear of

confrontation, and I have my fear of confrontation there.” Although he “got to pass” as he was unlikely to be spotted or outed, he was uncertain if the situation may be different for other 2SLGBTQI+ folks.

Daniel continued this topic and said he took the bus to commute between campus and home. Daniel would come across some male construction workers. He commented, “When I think of rough and tumble men with their beards, and their whole construction outfits with dirt, those are the ones that raise a flag for me from past experiences.” Daniel had the impression that they would say something “frankly rude, offensive, and inappropriate”. He could not imagine what the recourse would be, “It’s going to ruin my day, do I tell their supervisor somehow, like I can tell my supervisor, but then...” He went on to say, “They’ve been polite, I haven’t actually interacted with them. They seemed friendly, but those are the things I don’t know.” Daniel flagged white, hypermasculine men as “being the most uncomfortable, the most violent, and the most threatening” to him as a visible minority homosexual man. Daniel said that if a peer student or a professor makes him uncomfortable based on his sexual orientation, he knew where to report it and believed that the issue could be addressed. However, he did not know where to seek help if an incident occurred between him and a construction worker. He finally added, “There hasn’t been anything at all, but it’s definitely one of those wary, uncertain sort of spider-sense danger zones where I don’t know what can happen, and I need to be on guard rather than lost in my phone.”

Daniel thought that his university experiences had been socially and psychologically affirming. He was able to get connected with another gay PhD student with whom he felt comfortable sharing anything. Daniel shared his experiences with other new folks who were non-2SLGBTQI+,

It's a bit tiring having to explain things all the time, but it's really kind of fun that they're gaining something from being peers with me. Yes, we work on our schoolwork, but on top of that, they are learning not to be weird about meeting an LGBTQ2S+ person for the first time and how to ask a polite question about a partner or community without getting weird. They can be invited into the community a little bit; you're certainly welcome. We appreciate that you're a little cautious because you don't want to say the wrong thing, but at the same time, if your heart is in the right place, we can tell too.

Although Daniel found it exhausting to constantly explain LGBTQ2S+ issues but also appreciate his peers' effort to respectfully approach these topics, especially when their intent is genuine.

In terms of gaining access to healthcare providers, Daniel noticed that the Wellness Centre was trying to make it "inclusive, accessible, and a positive experience" for all students, such as one's choice of name in their paperwork section. Daniel said he was not actively searching for 2SLGBTQI+ resources because he "felt much more confident and assured" in his identity and his accomplishments transitioning from a young undergraduate student to a mature graduate student. Daniel knew about the Q Centre on the main campus but did not know about any other specific resources or programs for 2SLGBTQI+ students. He mentioned a professor he connected with whom he knew would be a great faculty resource if he encountered questions or problems. He explained, "If I did come across a peer who was really unhappy with my orientation and wanted to voice it, it wouldn't have the same impact on my mental health, on my mood, it would still be hurtful and damaging, and I'm glad it hasn't happened." He added that now he had "experience and confidence" to handle it well if microaggression or other problematic incidents occur.

Daniel self-identifies himself as a lifelong learner and perceives Higher Education as a huge benefit for gender and sexually diverse students. He believed that “education both helps us deal with prejudice a bit better as well as to eliminate prejudice on others.” Daniel argued that higher education is very important for 2SLGBTQI+ members because it would turn “incredibly educated individuals” into experts who have “great careers and can pursue their passions in a way with a lot of agencies.” Daniel said that some barriers and microaggressions are invisible to everyone else yet can make it impossible for a 2SLGBTQI+ person to participate. Daniel wanted to make higher education more welcoming for 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

Daniel thought that the heteronormativity was one of the major challenges facing 2SLGBTQI+ students. He observed that there was presumed heteronormativity and masculine default. He said, “If the University of Calgary really adopts the [gender] pronouns [policy] where everyone provides their pronouns at the start of the class, maybe that’s a little shift towards the right direction.” He also noticed that age was the main determinant in terms of handling 2SLGBTQI+ issues rather than gender or sex lines. He said the generally female-identified and young individuals took a more caring approach, whereas the older generation was “a lot more confused, hesitant, and maybe even on the side of being offensive.”

Daniel said he preferred events and spaces allowing people to attend and find their peers without losing their privacy and anonymity. He noticed the existence of gender-neutral bathrooms but thought there were not enough of them. As a homosexual male who can pass “within typical masculine archetypes”, Daniel was not experiencing many barriers. Daniel thought that he did not need “anything more”. Nevertheless, he stressed that the whole 2SLGBTQI+ community still needed more. He stated, “It’s my turn to say there are other people

who need to be taken seriously. I support what they say they need, absolutely.” Daniel hoped that the campus could become more inclusive for everyone.

Nelson was a first-year undergraduate student specializing in engineering, and he identified as a cisgender bisexual male. His campus life was normal, and he was very open about his sexuality as he said, “I don’t think there are people who do not know about it.” Nelson rated the University of Calgary seven out of ten on its 2SLGBTQI+ friendliness. When asked where those three missing points were, the first issue that came to his mind was that some university staff members were not well informed and educated on how to deal with 2SLGBTQI+- related situations, particularly using standard gender pronouns. He commented, “I found a lot of the staff tend to struggle with it; some of them aren’t the most willing to change.” Nelson thought the university could benefit from providing programs to educate its employees better. Nelson shared an unpleasant experience he and his non-binary friend encountered at the campus services center. After having been politely corrected regarding the gender pronouns his friend preferred to be addressed (they/them), the staff member who was helping them refused their request, and as Nelson recalled them saying, “I am just going to stick with he/him.” Nelson and his friend tried to explain that some people may not feel comfortable being addressed by incorrect gender pronouns. However, their attempt was resisted as Nelson said, “They were not exactly open to listening.”

Due to the nature of Nelson’s program, the classroom discussion was largely focused on mathematics and sciences, and there were few 2SLGBTQI+ related topics. Outside the classroom, he had a lot of superb conversations with many people, and he was pleased that most of them were open to listening and changing their perspectives. While it may not always be relevant, Nelson believed it is important to include 2SLGBTQI+ content in the curriculum and



course materials. He contended, “We want to make sure everyone is being represented and included in any content we are doing.” He found that gender and sexuality studies at UCalgary were doing outstanding work but argued that there should be a balance of different topics, as he asserted, “We also want to make sure we are not over cracking the LGBTQ+ issue, either.”

Nelson observed that most instructors and professors never tried to do anything harmful, but some were misinformed and did not know the subject matter. He reiterated, “They struggle with the ability to include the more neutral and inclusive language. I would say some of them do try, but they are struggling.” Nelson shared another story in the classroom where the professor kept using “he/him” to refer to his gender-neutral friend sitting next to him. Although feeling nervous since it was Nelson’s first interaction with a professor, he stood up for his friend, who was apparently in distress. After being politely corrected, this professor still failed to use the proper gender pronouns, as Nelson said, “They said they would try to be better, but they continue to be really not. They weren’t really able to grasp the concept.” Nelson further said, “They were good nature, they wanted to try, but they just couldn’t. They are very apologetic, and they really do genuinely have good intentions. It’s just a matter of not knowing how to express those good intentions properly.” He proposed that the university should provide more training, information, and education on gender and sexuality diversity to instructors, professors, and other staff members.

Nelson had been very open about his bisexuality yet had not had any bad experiences with students on campus. He said, “for the most part, things have been going well outside the class. I haven’t seen or experienced any problems myself. People are genuinely confused and willing to learn. That’s a great thing, and we’re here to learn.”

Nelson recalled another unpleasant experience with a teaching assistant who refused to give his transgender friend a mark for an assignment because the name provided did not match their deadname on D2L. The students were forced to contact the professor to resolve the issue. With respect to campus programs, resources, and policies for gender and sexually diverse students, Nelson mentioned the Q Centre, the Residence Rainbow Council, and QOC. He praised the 2SLGBTQI+ groups' work on campus, though he thought these groups and their events needed to be better advertised and promoted. He also stated that the university should be credited for helping people change their genders and names on academic reports. He further illustrated that it really depends on what kind of document the student would want to change. Unicards and academic reports were easy, whereas gender/name change was a difficult process for Nelson's transgender friend.

Nelson comes from a small town where sexism, homophobia, and transphobia are prevalent, and there is always a risk for gender and sexual minorities. By comparison, Nelson's campus life at UCalgary had been splendid as he described,

Here I've got a great community of people [who] feel the same and [are] very supportive of me. Honestly, it's been such a reaffirming place for me, mentally. There are many negative aspects, but as a whole, it's been a big improvement from my original experience. It's impacted me so much; I don't know what I'd have done without such a great community.

Nelson was grateful for the supportive community he found at UCalgary, noting its positive impact on his mental well-being. Despite some challenges, this community has been a significant improvement over past experience and has played a crucial role in his life.

Nelson believed that higher education could propel the presence of the 2SLGBTQI+ community as he said,

Hey, look, we're here; we're just like everyone else. We can do higher education. We're not broken. We're normal people. We can do it and still be ourselves. We don't have to hide who we are. We're not going anywhere; we are perfectly normal. We can do higher education and be ourselves. You just have to accept [our existence].

Nelson asserted that 2SLGBTQI+ individuals are just as capable and normal as anyone else in pursuing higher education. He emphasized the importance of acceptance and the right to be authentic without hiding one's identity.

Nelson thought that higher education could help reaffirm to 2SLGBTQI+ students that many people are different just like them. He commented, "It's not a problem; look at everybody else; they're all doing it. It's not a big deal. We're just de-stigmatizing it." However, Nelson maintained his reservations because he heard some not "so great" things from his friends who went to other postsecondary institutions. He added, "There are a lot of very damaging experiences that a lot of people have; it's a bit of risk if you go to the wrong place."

For changes that can make the campus safer and more inclusive, Nelson contended that the university should provide more education to the staff by informing and motivating them to create an inclusive environment for everyone. He explained why educating the university staff members is important, "People can't help if they don't understand. It should be the onus of the university to train its staff. Those queer people don't have to constantly validate and explain themselves." Nelson also thought there should be more gender-neutral washrooms and said it would take at least three minutes to walk to the nearest gender-neutral washroom. Nelson's

gender-neutral friend was forced to sneak into either the male or female washroom. He said, “They don’t enjoy it. It’s not a fun experience, but it’s kind of just what you have to do.”

Nelson shared that the engineering world was indeed very male and non-queer-dominated. He said, “We counted, and 78% of my class was male, and there were only four openly queer students.” Very coincidentally, Nelson was assigned into the same group with other three queer students. He described it as a great group in which they supported each other. Nelson admitted that there were a few stereotypes around bisexuality. He said,

There’s one that we’re all super promiscuous, likely eventually we’re eventually going to have to choose, but I am always going to be bisexual, I am always going to be attracted to both, whether I date a man, a woman, or something in between, always going to be who I am, even though I am with one person, doesn’t make me that sexuality. It’s not an in-between phase; it’s me. It’s always been me, and it will always be me.

Nelson challenged stereotypes about bisexuality, affirming that their attraction to multiple genders is constant, regardless of their current relationship. He rejected the notion that bisexuality is a phase, asserting it as a core and enduring part of his identity.

Larissa identified as a cisgender lesbian, and she started our dialogue by sharing with me a hilarious story. When she came to pursue an engineering program at the University of Calgary, she was expecting to see other 2SLGBTQI+ students as she said, “I wonder where those gay people are?” Larissa’s straight friend asked the exact same question during the lecture break, and interestingly, she was just sitting directly between Larissa and the other lesbian student at that time. Larissa did not think her sexual minority identity had much influence on her lived experiences on campus, as she said, “For the most part, it’s pretty much just your standard student experience. I haven’t had many negative experiences, I would say.” However, she

recalled an unpleasant incident where one of her classmates used the word “dyke” during their group work conversation. She found that term offensive, and it made her uncomfortable. She also noted that this person was generally ignorant and negative about any racial, sexual, and religious minorities.

Larissa thought, “The university is trying its best” to support gender and sexually diverse students. However, she did not know much about campus resources and healthcare providers for these students, and she did not use any of them. Regarding 2SLGBTQI+ content in the curriculum and classroom, she said, “I feel like they are not purposely included, but they are not purposely avoided, either. Nobody sitting here, like throwing the topic because they are usually not that relevant.” She argued that 2SLGBTQI+ content should be included when it is relevant. Larissa indicated that the professors have been mostly respectful, yet she had come across more anti-feminist type of people than anti-2SLGBTQI+ in the male-dominated field of engineering. Regarding the overall campus climate for gender and sexually diverse students, Larissa said that most people she interacted with were well-intentioned. In her own words,

People try to be nice and inclusive; the people I am talking about I have had bad experiences with, and I think they are the exception. In general, most people try to respect other people’s opinions and stuff like that. Of the straight people I have met, they are very nice and try to be respectful about stuff, and they will listen.

Larissa thought that the campus was generally safe for 2SLGBTQI+ students as she expected the college campus to be, as she shared, “I’ve never felt to the point where I feel unsafe, or I’m scared of something is going to happen to me.”

I feel like I am the wrong kind of gay person to go to these [2SLGBTQI+] spaces. I feel like my own perspective, my own sexuality, just does not match what is expected [at] the

level of how they describe and relate to themselves. I feel like I am looking at two different lenses—the planet I live on and the planet everyone else lives on.

The above remark is how Larissa felt about visiting specific spaces for gender and sexually diverse students. Somehow, she felt isolated by the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Larissa held different views about gender identities and sexualities, and she felt the implicit pressure that she could not express her “non-fashionable” perspectives with people within the 2SLGBTQI+ community. She felt frustrated and explained, “There’s pressure to pick the most inclusive way of saying something, the most progressive that can include the most possible people even if that doesn’t make sense.” Another example Larissa shared is that she does not prefer to use the term “queer” because it had been used in a derogatory way in where she comes from.

Larissa argued that higher education provides opportunities to any underrepresented groups, not unique to the 2SLGBTQI+ community, saying,

You get into places like higher education, the most difficult part is not really seeing yourself in people who’ve already made it. That’s going to come with time because more people are entering [higher education], eventually, you see success in people that are like yourself, you have opportunities mentoring people like yourself, you see someone who is similar to you who has walked your path, that makes it easier.

Her reflection illustrates the challenge of not seeing representation in higher education but is hopeful that as more diverse individuals enter the field, it will become easier for others to find mentors and role models who share similar backgrounds and experiences.

When asked about her views about the gender-neutral washrooms on campus, Larissa expressed her reservations about those large open gender-neutral washrooms because she does not wish to share the use of a washroom with male or male-identifying people. While she did not

support the idea of replacing all the current washrooms with gender-neutral ones, she was in favor of introducing more gender-neutral washrooms for people who prefer using them.

Larissa thought “assuming the worst of people” was the problem in terms of creating a more inclusive and diverse campus. She hoped that the university could offer more space for open dialogues about 2SLGBTQI+ issues. Larissa wished to see a truly inclusive space where “you can ask questions and voice disagreements and opinions without feeling like somebody is going to immediately dogpile you like you are wrong because your opinion isn’t the most up to date”. Larissa proposed creating a space where people can have honest discussions and conversations even if they may not always agree. She elaborated on her thoughts:

I think people implicitly know they’re going to be dogpiled, so they don’t ask the questions, so they go to the people who will talk to them, and the people who will talk to them are people who hold the exact opposite opinions like they hate gay people kind of thing. If you are not willing to be the person who allows these wrong questions, someone else will answer their questions. You are not going to like what they have to tell you. You will turn away people who could’ve been great allies and support systems just because you are not willing to have a little disagreement with people who don’t see things exactly like you do, which I don’t think is helpful and constructive.

Larissa highlights the significance of engaging with those who have differing views, warning that avoiding these conversations may push people towards extreme and harmful perspectives. She maintained that allowing space for difficult questions can help build potential allies and foster constructive dialogue.

Natalie is a gender non-binary Muslim student who identifies as queer and bisexual. The safe place they were referring to is the FSC where they met a lot of their friends who are also

religious and queer. They said, “Overall, I am very grateful that I’ve found a place on campus where I can be myself and express myself, express my gender identity and my sexual identity. It’s a place that was very affirming and welcoming for myself.” Natalie’s campus experience has not had many impacts on their academic performance, but they expressed their frustration that some statistics in some courses were very gender binary and lack of queer representations.

In the classroom environment, Natalie unfortunately had uncomfortable experiences. Despite communicating with the professors in their faculty via email and one-on-one conversation, there was not much respect for their gender pronouns, and misgendering was very common. They once sent an introduction email to a professor who taught the course they were about to take and informed them that they use they/them pronouns. However, the professor still addressed them by she/her in the class. They never tried to correct the professors due to the power imbalance between students and professors. Another main reason was that they were considering applying for graduate school and working with some of the professors, so they did not want to “ruin their chance” by calling them out. They explained, “I think a lot of people don’t want to risk it because it’s already hard to go to grad school. Obviously, it makes you feel not great when that happens, misgendering and whatever, but at the same time, for myself anyway, I don’t want to ruin my chance. It’s just one moment, and I can deal with it.” If given a chance to speak with those classmates and professors who have not respected their pronouns, Natalie would want to let them know:

You know, I’ve mentioned a few times to you that my pronouns are they/them, I would really appreciate it if you could respect that because it kind of sucks when you don’t. I don’t know if you would appreciate it if I kept messing up your name or something.



When asked what they would like to tell those people who think it is too hard to adapt to using inclusive language, they shared,

Isn't it better to make people feel comfortable as someone in [our specialization]? One of the principles is to make people feel comfortable, advocate for people, and allow people to develop and grow to the best of their abilities in the best way they can. This is one thing that might hinder their development. We know microaggressions hinder proper development. While this might not be a big deal to you, it is also, unfortunately, a form of microaggression.

Natalie contended that it would set the tone for the class if professors and students could introduce themselves with their gender pronouns at the start of the class. They argued that professors have a certain power over students, so they can raise awareness among students and hold them accountable for respecting people's diverse identities. They shared a bittersweet story that happened to them. Their close friend told them that a professor mentioned them and their viewpoints in a class when they were absent. That professor used the incorrect pronouns to refer to Natalie, but their friend excluded this detail out of her kindness to make them feel comfortable. Later, Natalie found out the truth, which gave them mixed feelings. On the one hand, they were very happy that their friend was considerate and showing support. On the other hand, they were disappointed at the fact that the professor still misgendered them.

While Natalie had repeatedly reminded their classmates about their gender pronouns, their classmates continued to misgender them, which made Natalie feel upset and disrespected. When asked why their classmates kept ignoring their request to be addressed properly, they said that maybe they had not expressed their discontent directly, so their classmates thought, "It is not a big deal." Another reason may be that they used to present themselves in a more "feminine" way

that did not align with students' perceptions of "what a non-binary person should be like." Although they tried to bring gender and sexual minority topics to the classroom discussions, these 2SLGBTQI+ issues were not well recognized and understood. Their classmates seemed to be indifferent about these issues. Their professors were a bit surprised and unprepared, addressing Natalie in a way that made them speechless: "That's a great question. You should do research on that." Natalie felt that there were a lot of assumptions about "straightness" and said, "There seemed to be kind of pressure to be straight."

Regarding the 2SLGBTQI+ content, Natalie used the word "difficult" to describe the situation in actual classroom discussions. They thought that there should be more queer perspectives and 2SLGBTQI+ content added to the curriculum. They said there was only one gender development course, and it was mainly focused on women, though gender and sexual minorities were also mentioned. They also recalled that 2SLGBTQI+ folks and development were being discussed in another lecture. They said that some of the professors in their program are from outside Canada, so they may hold different views about the diversity of gender constructions around the world. However, Natalie seemed hesitant about the inference they were making about their professors.

Natalie thought that the campus climate towards gender and sexual minorities is relatively accepting on the surface in the sense that "no one is going to be like call you a slur to your face." However, they realized that people are not accepting underneath the tolerant surface. For instance, Natalie was accidentally added to an Instagram group chat of all U of C students. They noticed that people made very homophobic and transphobic comments openly in that group chat. Natalie knew some of those people as they said, "I know what they are and what their beliefs are, but they've never said anything to me. I don't think they would ever say anything to

me outright.” Natalie reckoned that inclusion only stays at the surface level as they shared, “As long as you don’t talk about your queer identity, a lot of people will be your friends. But when you bring that up, a lot of people will feel uncomfortable, or they are not as open as they were.” Through the involvement of the EDI committee in their department, Natalie found that some of the professors have a history of being transphobic. For example, there was a student who identified as non-binary and gay, wanting to investigate a topic related to gay men. Their professor strongly insisted that they could only conduct the research by using the deviant’s lens, which was against that student’s will. What’s worse, that professor also refused to respect this student’s pronouns. That student told Natalie, “I don’t think there is any point bringing it up because this professor is a tenure; it’s not going to do anything.” They eventually chose not to file a complaint about that professor as they feared that such action would jeopardize their future academic journey and that they would be treated differently.

Concerning 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus, Natalie mentioned The Q Centre and QOC. Natalie said in the survey, “Spaces for LGBTQ+ students run by students can make it sometimes not as inclusive and welcoming.” They shared more details about their experience at the Q Centre and elaborated on their viewpoint on this. As a visible religious person of colour, they did not find the environment very inviting. They once went there to study and hang out with another two friends with one being queer and another being a gay man of colour. They said, “As soon as we went in, everyone was just kind of staring at us. Everyone in the centre was white, and we weren’t.” One of the volunteers greeted them, but not in an open and friendly way. Natalie did not want to speculate at that moment, but their other friends told them they felt the same way when they left the Q Centre: “They don’t want us there, we don’t want to be like, it’s because

we're not white, or it's because we're religiously presenting. I don't know if that was the reason. It just felt like it was an exclusive club, almost."

Natalie has not witnessed or experienced any discriminatory incident themselves, but their friend told them a harmful story. A student was remarking Nazi Germany's agenda of eliminating gay people. They argued,

If you look at it from Hitler's perspective, he had his own reasons. Not that we should do it right now, but maybe we have to think about it from his perspective. He thought it was just the best for the people.

This hateful comment made their friend extremely uncomfortable, but the professor did not intervene and stop him. Their friend went to speak with the professor after class about this severe issue. Shockingly, that professor justified the student's behavior by saying, "As long as he wasn't saying it to you, you know we have to look at all sides of the argument." Their friend gave up because they could not seek help from a professor who did not care.

In commenting on the safety level on campus for gender and sexually diverse students, Natalie said, "The campus is relatively safe as long as you are not 100% out." They did not think anyone would attack a 2SLGBTQI+ individual on campus because of the potential repercussions or expulsion they may face. However, they added that the safety level also depends on the communities the 2SLGBTQI+ students belong to. They said, "If you're part of a club that's not queer affirming, and you come out to them, you're going to be ostracized. Depending on who you hang out with, there's that risk of you being isolated."

As a gender and sexual minority, the campus lived experience has social impacts on Natalie. They said, "Being at university, being able to be in a space where I am pretty much out to everyone and being respected have been empowering in the sense that I do feel like I can

advocate for myself a little better.” Natalie shared that they took part in a protest on campus and were interviewed by the Gauntlet—the University of Calgary’s independent & student-run newspaper. Natalie was quoted in their article, but their gender pronouns were not addressed properly. Natalie requested that this problem be solved and received a positive reply from the Gauntlet. They shared how they were feeling about this experience,

It was sort of taking that power back. This is my comfort level, so I think being able to have that sort of space where I’m able to be out and open and understand that it’s okay for me to demand these things, I think that’s empowered me a lot and made me a lot more confident in taking these small steps.

Apparently, Natalie gained the empowerment by asserting their comfort level and being open about their identity. This process boosted their confidence, allowing them to take small but important steps in reclaiming their space and autonomy. Nevertheless, Natalie expressed their fear of being retaliated or treated differently if a student does not follow the professors’ beliefs. They said, “I don’t know if I would ever confront a professor, but I think maybe one day.”

Natalie had some terrible memories of using healthcare services on campus. Natalie said that many queer students wanted to use counseling services yet were pushed away by non-inclusive practices. They shared their experiences with two counselors at the Wellness Centre. One of them was not able to use Natalie’s proper pronouns despite Natalie informed and reminded her of their choice of pronouns multiple times. Besides, this counselor suggested Natalie a heterosexual relationship, which ignored their queer identity. Natalie then decided to stop visiting her anymore. The other counselor also failed to use Natalie’s right pronouns and did not have enough cultural awareness. Natalie described the situation at that moment.

I don't want to do certain things because I'm Muslim. And she was like, but it's okay, you can do it. And I'm like, you don't understand. She was always not sensitive in terms of that. And I was like, I don't really feel comfortable talking to you.

When asked about the overall quality of campus life and UCalgary's 2SLGBTQI+ friendliness. Natalie said, "I would give it a six, maybe 6.5." They thought there was a lack of faculty support. They did not know their professors' attitudes and stances on 2SLGBTQI+ rights. They said, "That makes me very hesitant even to sometimes talk to them about certain things." Natalie reiterated that the acceptance only stayed at the surface level. They commented, "People on their private channels and private chats are not very accepting."

Natalie believed that 2SLGBTQI+ students pursuing higher education would bring new perspectives into academia, which would challenge the traditional idea of academia being "very white, very male, very straight". They also made a remark, "It also means that the program we create will be more inclusive, that they will be taking in different perspectives into account." On the flip side, Natalie said that the cost of postsecondary education can be a financial burden for queer students, and they also expressed the concern of not completing one's degree within a certain amount of time—7 years. Natalie thought that it would be daunting to go through the required procedures.

Natalie strongly agreed that UCalgary should employ more full-time staff to run the 2SLGBTQI+ groups and events because this would ensure different protocols and policies are adhered to. Natalie also thought there should be more spaces for 2SLGBTQI+ students to meet outside clubs and bars. They explained, "Not everyone feels comfortable going to a club or a bar. Students like me, I'm Muslim, so I don't drink, I don't go to clubs, there's not enough opportunity for me to meet other queer students." Natalie would want an alcohol-free place

where people who may not like the club environment can go. Natalie thought that gender-neutral washrooms were an important issue and that there should be more gender-neutral washrooms. Natalie used to attend many classes in the education building, but there was no gender-neutral bathroom for them to use. They said, “That was kind of an issue, it's always interesting, because you just go in, and you're like, well, what can I do? I just kind of try to use whatever is there. And it's uncomfortable.”

As a BIPOC queer student, Natalie always felt hesitant to attend certain events because they worried that they might be the only BIPOC student. Natalie recounted attending a speed dating event that they described to be “very heteronormative, heterosexual”, which made them uncomfortable. Therefore, Natalie hoped to see more inclusive and queer-friendly or specific events in which people from diverse backgrounds are welcome and 2SLGBTQI+ spaces run by staff that are open and fun for students to visit. Natalie believed faculty training on inclusivity and diversity is necessary because relying on student clubs to resolve the issues would be difficult. They said, “You need to do this training to make yourself more inclusive in terms of gender and sexual diversity.”

Natalie wanted to debunk some myths about gender non-binary and bisexuality, emphasizing that gender presentation does not determine gender identity, and that bisexuality includes attraction to more than two genders. Their perspective broadens the understanding of both identities:

If someone is non-binary, their presentation doesn't define their gender identity. Someone could be very feminine or very masculine presenting, and they could still be non-binary. The idea of being androgynous is something only a very, very small set of people can fit into. Bisexuality means you can like people from more than two genders. Being bisexual means you acknowledge that you like people from two or more.

Tara is a non-binary student who identifies with multiple sexual orientations. They did not frequent campus much due to the pandemic, yet they sometimes studied at their workstations in their faculty. They were expecting UCalgary to be more equipped in terms of inclusive facilities. More specifically, they pointed out that there was no gender-neutral washrooms in their department building. They shared their experience at the campus health clinic and said that the physician they met was not sufficiently knowledgeable about the sexual activities people of different sexualities may engage in. That physician also assumed that Tara was cisgender and heterosexual. Tara felt that they were not being seen- their gender identity and sexual orientation were invisible. Nevertheless, Tara said their university experiences did not affect their academic performance.

In terms of courses that included 2SLGBTQI+ content, Tara recalled taking a course titled “Anti-Oppression Education” and was happy that 2SLGBTQI+ related content was purposely included, and students were reminded to include their pronouns in their introduction posts on D2L, which could be used as a reference later. Tara accidentally used a student’s deadname in one of their posts for the course. They realized that quickly and corrected their mistake by referring to the introduction posts. Tara said that the other courses they had taken were not avoiding 2SLGBTQI+ topics, but they thought that all the courses should include 2SLGBTQI+ people and issues as “they should also include people with other diverse identities such as disabled people and people of colour. Curriculum shouldn’t just teach us the history of cisgender white people.” In the survey, Tara noted that instructors and professors rarely make assumptions and sometimes use inclusive language of instructions. In addition, they found that peer students of their age tend to be more aware of gender and sexual diversity, whereas older students are more likely to assume people’s sexuality or pronouns. They said, “They refrain from



assuming people's gender or sexuality, refrain from using pronouns that can go with someone's (gendered) names.

At one of the class discussion posts, Tara's classmate shared that her friends kept addressing her partner by the wrong pronouns who went through a gender transition. Tara and some other queer students replied to her post to share similar experiences and show their support. Tara said, "That was a wholesome moment. I mean, as a queer person, I believe that we stand together. We try to support each other. There were straight people but allies; they were also supporting her and her partner."

Regarding the 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus, Tara knew about GSA2, QOC, and the Rainbow Council. They said they saw their posts on social media and their events being circulated in newsletters and emails. Tara thought these groups were not very active and would like to see more of their events. "I guess it's because of Covid. Until Covid ends, it's not very applicable because of the restrictions."

Tara did not witness or encounter harassment or discriminatory incidents of any kind outside class. Tara rated 8 out of 10 on the safety level on campus for gender and sexually diverse students, but they also said they did not explore the entire campus. Tara found it easy to acquire 2SLGBTQI+ resources. They said, "Because I'm in a Gender and Sexuality Alliance group, and there are some communities that are sharing resources." Tara said they found relevant resources on an equity, diversity, and inclusion webpage of UCalgary before pursuing their program. Tara said they also got information from the Q Centre, but they said the existence of the Q Centre was not publicly offered to all students. Tara argued that 2SLGBTQI+ resources should be included on UCalgary's main page to show explicit support. They said, "people can see it and read it, be informed and allied." Tara believed that it was also important to make 2SLGBTQI+

resources publicly available to non-2SLGBTQI+ students so that they could be better informed and support their peers when they see discrimination.

Tara thought that Higher Education offered great resources and opportunities for someone to develop their personality, ideas, values, and knowledge. They said, “It can lead to leadership opportunities, both professionally and socially, and personally [as well].” Regarding how the University of Calgary can become safer and more inclusive, Tara hoped to see more gender-neutral washrooms on campus. They thought that UCalgary could offer training programs to faculty, staff, and administrative members so that they could ask and address people’s gender pronouns correctly instead of making assumptions about their appearance. They added, “They can encourage all faculty members to start their lessons by introducing themselves and their pronouns, [including] their introduction part in their course content so that people know about that person’s pronouns and preferred names.” Tara also suggested how UCalgary could improve its practice to better support and meet the needs of 2SLGBTQI+ students. They stated, “They should require staff to take in-service seminars regularly to educate themselves on these 2SLGBTQI+ issues and ways to address and include all people, so that they should encourage them to create a safe space by addressing, standing up against 2SLGBTQI+phobic comments.

Phoenix identifies themselves as queer and gender non-binary. They started their UCalgary journey as a master’s student, and after that, they continued pursuing their PhD program. “Coming into my program, I was very open about my queerness.” Phoenix thought that having a supportive supervisor made a difference in making them feel comfortable being out. They started to disclose their transgender identity recently, and they believed that there was a lack of general understanding of transgender people. Phoenix did not think the university supported students regardless of their identities and backgrounds. Phoenix thought that heteronormativity dominates

the campus discourse, and they did not see themselves being included when people in leadership positions failed to make space for them, such as by using binary pronouns all the time. Phoenix needed to conduct research up north and they said that there were some safety precautions specifically for queer and transgender students that students did not have to take. Phoenix thought that the school would be harmful to gender and sexually diverse students if 2SLGBTQI+ content was not included in the course materials and curriculum. “They already contain heterosexual content, they already contain cisgender content, so why not include us?”

Phoenix observed that there were more and more international students in the graduate population in their faculty and believed that 2SLGBTQI+ issues should not be avoided among this student group. They said,

There are these pockets of students [who] understand queer issues, there are pockets of students coming from different backgrounds where [2SLGBTQI+] issues are not to be discussed]. In seminar settings and class settings, our professors and leadership are acting in a way that doesn't include trans and queer students.

Phoenix noted the division among students regarding understanding 2SLGBTQI+ issues and criticized the lack of actions by professors and leadership in academic settings, which marginalizes transgender and queer students.

Phoenix thought that this could lead to a vicious cycle that is detrimental to gender and sexual minorities. Phoenix stressed that it is not the onus of the international students to educate themselves about 2SLGBTQI+ issues and that the faculty should take a proactive approach to include this dialogue. “This is an important part you need to learn about because it's just who we are.” When asked of positive or negative classroom experiences, Phoenix recalled taking an Indigenous Leadership course which she spoke highly of where they were offered time and space

to share their perspectives as a queer person through topics being discussed in class, in their words, “that one was the only time I think I’ve felt safe as a student in a class setting.”

Phoenix felt unsafe on campus as they elaborated, “I have seen at least four of my peers go through something and then be completely ignored, they reported, and nothing [was] done.” They said that 3 of these instances that took place on campus and in class were related to 2SLGBTQI+ issues. Phoenix thought that there was a lot of ignorance in her faculty. They said there would be a very important conference in their field taking place in Russia; however, they did not feel safe going there even if not attending this conference would hinder their professional development. “I tell [my concern] to my straight, cis professors, they don’t think about it.” Contrary to some of my other participants’ views, Phoenix thought that mandatory training would not solve the problem, although they acknowledged it may help a little. They explained, “The professors who want to learn don’t need the mandatory training. The professors who don’t want to learn or who won’t learn. The mandatory training is not going to change anything for them. They are just going to check the box off.” Phoenix took an approach of not making graduate life all their life. They said, “I have support outside the university; that’s really what has helped me balance the institutional harm with my life.”

Phoenix did not involve much with 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus, but they iterated the importance of these queer groups because they could provide a community of care and support. Phoenix experienced a lot of misgendering and the assumption of their heterosexuality, which they deemed harmful. “That may seem small, but you know, they add up.” Despite having tried to address misgendering and incorrect use of their gender pronouns, Phoenix was still constantly misgendered and referred to by the wrong pronouns. They continued to say,

When I emphasized that when people are misgendered, there's a lot of research showing that they are at higher risk of mental health issues and higher risk of suicide. It doesn't seem like that life-threatening aspect is computing for them. It's actually really important that you are listening to me. You start using the right pronouns for me.

Phoenix stressed the disastrous impacts associated with misgendering and acknowledged using correct pronouns as a matter of respect and safety. Phoenix was also very frustrated by the binary choices of gender (male/female) during the conference registration process. They explained, "I haven't registered for one conference yet where wasn't mandatory for me to disclose my gender and for me to have an appropriate selection for me to disclose my gender."

Phoenix did not think the campus was safe for 2SLGBTQI+ students. They criticized the lack of security presence in campus buildings, which they thought was problematic in case of an incident. Phoenix was also not satisfied with the access to gender-neutral washrooms. "I don't know of any gender-neutral washrooms on the Foothills campus." Phoenix was disheartened that people in leadership positions only offered lip services and were unwilling to address the real issues facing 2SLGBTQI+ students. They said that there were queer students having chosen to leave because they did not feel safe. Phoenix thought the issue was systemic, and they could not have made it this far without the small support network (their partner and friends). They also felt that they were not able to seek mental or health support through university resources and services. One of the reasons they noted was unavailability due to the high demand. Phoenix expressed their disappointment for the university and chose not to ask for anything from it. "I have seen them severely fail my colleagues. That has really impacted the way I see the university." Phoenix wanted to protect themselves and changed their approach so that they did not have to deal with what their colleagues had to experience.

I asked Phoenix how they would rate the overall quality of campus life at UCalgary. Their answer was “zero”. “I think the saving graces that the university has are those student-led groups.” When asked why they would give such a low rating, Phoenix recounted, “Every institutional process I’ve been through hasn’t resulted in anything. There’s been no transparency about the process, about what’s going on behind the scenes.” This “leading to nowhere and not hearing anything back” situation made Phoenix lose their faith in the university. Phoenix thought that there were no proper or well-defined procedures in place for them to report. They repeated twice, “Nothing’s being changed.” Phoenix thought that the root causes beneath the process had been overlooked, “We are not changing the system that creates the problem.” To move forward, Phoenix argued that there should be an acknowledgment of the harm caused by the system. Phoenix believed that there should be more 2SLGBTQI+ representation in higher education, saying, “Having that representation can really make a big difference.” However, Phoenix thought that the university operates as a corporation, “they are looking out for themselves and the university as a business, and that ends up protecting the people who are harming us. The victims of hate crimes lose out.” Regarding the pitfalls of higher education, Phoenix said, “It means surviving through trauma dealt [with] by the university. The harm caused by the institutions themselves.” To make the university safer and more inclusive for 2SLGBTQI+ students, Phoenix suggested an external review of the university’s policies and procedures conducted by a panel of experts whose qualifications are open to the public. They stressed that the final evaluation result must be publicized.

“Being listened to but being not felt” is the major setback for 2SLGBTQI+ students who voiced their concerns. Phoenix said, “I don’t think we can create an environment that is safe for us without people feeling those testimonies.” Phoenix continued to share their experience, “They

are quick to jump and move on rather than reflecting on what I shared with them; it's not translating into actual care for us." Phoenix thought some straight cisgender people "colonize perceptions of gender" and question rather than believe when a student raises a queer or trans issue. They believed that it is crucial to have someone who has the real power and ability to act and make changes, and they added, "not just a figurehead because a figurehead is not going to do anything, they won't listen." Phoenix thought that the leadership failed to realize the connection between helping people interrogate societal problems and advancing research for more funding. They said, "We're on a purpose of potential to be better scholars. So why aren't we getting there? We just need that support."

Phoenix hoped to see more gender-neutral washrooms but thought that not all washrooms should be gender-neutral, noting some religious restrictions. Phoenix believed that sharing pronouns would be a good start regarding short-term changes. They gave an example,

If our university is holding a conference, make sure all their registration questions are appropriate and include appropriate options for responses. Having surface-level safety, which I think is perhaps the very bare minimum that we can ask for.

Phoenix thought that the missing training on methodologies, worldviews, or any epistemological or philosophical things in the domain of science was problematic,

It's [the] baseline to everything that we're doing all the time, but we're not trained to query into those. If we start to learn more about who we are, including what and how we know, we can be more inclusive [of] how other people know and start to fit in the nuances [of] the world better.

They continued to share their perspectives, "We're just being taught it within a white supremacy frame, which then goes down to all our other systems, capitalism, homophobia, racism, etc. If we

start looking more systemically into our education, then maybe we can create a trickle-down effect.” Phoenix’s analysis of systemic issues in education is acute yet solving these systemic problems could potentially lead to positive societal change.

Phoenix thought that increasing inclusivity helps everyone, “not just those little non-binary kids.” They also said, “I think, in general, we learn better in [a] community when we’re being inclusive and respectful. Listening to each other is stronger and faster than if we learn individually.” Phoenix believed that the changes and reforms start with every one of us. We ended our conversation with their question: “How do we change education when the individual was already educated in a harmful system?” This question is for me, educational stakeholders, and my dear readers to ponder.

Potter, a cisgender gay student, has been on campus for 5 years pursuing his master’s and PhD programs. Prior to the pandemic, he had spent a lot of time in his own faculty building, MacEwan Student Hall, and Taylor Teaching and Learning Institute. Potter’s campus experience has been very positive, and he spoke highly of his faculty, which is a safe space for him. However, he also stressed that most of the people who know his sexual orientation are from his faculty. As he said, “People in my faculty are very nice and respectful, at least [to] my experience.” Although he found the campus community generally accepting and understanding, he encountered microaggressions. In his own words, “Usually I don’t experience a lot of aggression on campus, small little things, pick on some of the identities, but not outright homophobic attack or anything.”

Potter’s only negative experiences on campus took place outside his own faculty settings. While attending some committee meetings, Potter saw people rolling their eyes when he mentioned his choice of pronouns. He perceived this as a microaggression, stating that “it’s the



only time they rolled their eyes.” People were questioning Potter’s intention of sharing his pronouns despite Potter explaining that he introduces his pronouns as an inclusive practice for others who may use pronouns that they do not “visually identify with.” He heard a disrespectful remark: “If you identify as he/him and look male, why do you bother telling anyone?” Potter used to list his pronouns in his email signature but decided to remove them because he was questioned by two people who asked him why it matters. Potter treated those unpleasant instances as “teachable moments” because he wanted to help people gain an inclusive understanding of things such as gender pronouns. He never followed up with those people, so he did not know whether it was a constructive exchange. After the meeting, Potter tried to reach out to the person who rolled their eyes. However, they offered an insincere apology, and the communication did not go well because they did not want to listen.

Another person, who was also at the meeting and who uses gender-neutral pronouns (They/Them), expressed their appreciation to Potter for the fact that he introduced himself by including his gender pronouns. Potter said he wanted to do this for the gender-fluid members of the queer community, sharing that “they might be changing pronouns or do not know which pronouns they identify with”, particularly gender non-binary people or people in transition. Potter pointed out that microaggressions towards queer people are easily overlooked or unnoticed by people outside the 2SLGBTQI+ community. “No one responded or had any reaction to the eye-rolling. To my knowledge, no one followed up with that person after the meeting.” Whenever Potter tried to discuss issues like gender pronouns or being scoffed at, people would accuse him of being oversensitive.” Potter had hoped that the chair of that committee could have initiated a conversation when microaggressions occur. However, as Potter noted, “there is not really a cue visually as [to] someone’s [queer] identity.” Potter added,

I am not offended by that, but you were creating a space other people may not feel comfortable [in]. Identifying the fact that they have pronouns you may not assume [they prefer certain pronouns], or they may not feel comfortable identifying with [certain pronouns]. Just be respectful of everyone because you never know who's in the room.

Potter reiterated the importance of using gender pronouns, especially for gender-fluid individuals and people who are in the process of transitioning or still trying to figure out their identities. Potter also observed that the 2SLGBTQI+ members are expected to respond when microaggressions and other discriminatory things occur in the community. Potter expressed his frustration when people make assumptions about his partner being of the opposite sex. Potter also found bringing his boyfriend to faculty or university events awkward, though people in his department were very nice. He elaborated on his concern,

As a graduate student, I am checking a lot of the boxes. I am publishing, I am winning awards, like big awards, I am doing my best to be as proper as possible, and I am trying to fit this ideal graduate student mold as closely as I can.

Potter thought that bringing a same-sex partner to an event would fail people's expectations even if he had not encountered any. In his own words, "It does not fit my narrative of fitting into this perfect box."

Potter did not engage the 2SLGBTQI+ community or attend any events because he had never been mentally prepared. He also said, "I find a lot of LGBTQ2S+ members of the community on campus are really strong social justice advocates, which is fantastic. I just don't have the language to talk about that in the same way." Potter said he appreciated the work of these social justice advocates, and he felt guilty about not doing enough for the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Another "stupid and superficial" reason Potter shared why he felt reluctant to

involve himself in the community is that he did not feel confident about his self-image, saying, “So many people in the community are so perfectly presented, I just feel like I’m the awkward looking one in a group of perfectly polished humans.” Potter also expressed his concern that marginalized groups are getting pitted against each other in their race for equity, diversity, and inclusion and thought that there should be an “even balance” of BIPOC, Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQI+ considerations. He commented, “I think sometimes members of each of those communities vie for the top spot in equity, diversity, and inclusion. So, by fighting against each other for recognition, they’re hurting each other at the same time.” He wished people could give each other space to talk and collaborate on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Potter observed that there is a lot of “unresolved anger” within the 2SLGBTQI+ community caused by trauma and negative things that happened to people. Potter was aware of his privileges as being white, cisgender, and having a very accepting family. He said, “That’s also part of [the] reason why I kind of watch from the sidelines coz I’ve been very fortunate; I have lived a life as blessed as possible while being in this community. I don’t have a lot of anger, I don’t want to invalidate their anger, I don’t know how to help them process that anger, but I do want to help people who have gone through darker times in the community.”

Regarding the 2SLGBTQI+ content, Potter could not recall any lectures and classroom conversations purposely or explicitly focused on this field; however, he also did not think 2SLGBTQI+ issues had been deliberately excluded, either. Although some professors in his faculty are allies or advocates of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, they have not been able to bring 2SLGBTQI+ content into the classroom in a real sense. As an individual effort, Potter incorporated 2SLGBTQI+ topics into the undergraduate courses he was instructing. While working as a teaching assistant at the undergraduate level, he observed that some students raised

concerns about teaching 2SLGBTQI+ perspectives out of the fear that parents may be opposed to it; in Potter's words, "It's considered deviant." Porter intervened and tried to lead the students' discussion in a "healthy" direction because he thought 2SLGBTQI+ inclusion was important. Potter wished that the 2SLGBTQI+ specific studies were covered in the research methods classes. Potter pointed out that while many studies are adopting different research methods that focus on the 2SLGBTQI+ community, they did not appear to be on the reading list. He further explained,

Even if they are on the list, it's like one study out of twenty on different topics. I realized that it cannot be all LGBTQ2S+, nor do I think it should be like an entire course just on that one topic, but some inclusion here and there of it would be nice.

Potter pointed out the limited inclusion of LGBTQ2S+ topics in his studies and would have appreciated a more frequent and integrated representation.

Potter argued that 2SLGBTQI+- focused classes should be taught by 2SLGBTQI+ professors. He also thought that some professors were reluctant to teach 2SLGBTQI+ topics because they were afraid of making mistakes and offending people. He believed that the EDI push has created a "nervous" environment for older professors and said,

They worry if they teach in the same way they've been teaching, that they're somehow in violation of these new EDI principles. There's a fear that they aren't inclusive enough, or they haven't adapted enough to this new environment that's aware of EDI considerations.

Potter's perspective reflected the predicament some professors may encounter as they try to follow the new EDI trend.

Potter said he had never encountered anything he considers as microaggressions or homophobic behaviors from other students. Potter shared what he described as an interesting

interaction. A student, who is from a country where same-sex relationships are illegal, attended a research event that Potter organized. He was taken aback when he saw Potter showing some affection to his same-sex partner. Potter approached him and conversed with him for twenty minutes as he recalled, “he is not mean at all; that was the first time in his whole life that he has ever seen two men can be so intimate with each other. He didn’t say anything offensive, but he was genuinely shocked and curious.” Potter remembered calling out a student loudly on campus whom he saw spitting onto the rainbow flag on the stone that people could paint on to express their support for human rights.

Potter hoped that professors and students could call each other out when microaggressions occur, such as “intentional misuse” of gender pronouns. He said, “Use it as an educational tool; it’s not meant to publicly shame them.”, he iterated. Potter said that his peers and colleagues shared stories when professors failed or refused to use or acknowledge their gender pronouns. “The worst argument I have seen is that people say it’s not grammatically correct. We are not talking about grammar. We are talking about something else.” Potter witnessed another misgendering incident in a committee meeting, which was played off as a joke. The committee chair mistakenly used the assumed gender pronouns to refer to a person who had introduced their gender pronouns as *ze/zir*, and *they/them*. This individual corrected the committee chair immediately but was met with arrogance. “They kind of chuckled, [saying] there are so many pronouns to remember now, then immediately moved on.” Potter’s interpretation of those awkward moments is that the committee chair tried to “defuse the tension” in the room, which was inappropriately handled. Potter also said, “That committee chair, to their credit, was respectful for the rest of that meeting and did follow the proper pronouns after that instance.”

Potter received kind wishes from people as he sometimes shared food made by his partner, and he found these “moments of inclusion” affirming. “It’s demonstrating to the person that it’s safe to be who you are, and they care about you as a person.”, he said. He believed that social justice practice can be achieved through little gestures; he then shared another positive experience,

I remember I brought desserts to one professor’s class, and every time after that, when I saw her in meetings or the hallway before COVID hit, she also [asked] how [my partner] was. It means more than people assume [it] means. It’s a really nice thing; I appreciate it. This comment captures Potter’s appreciation for the professor’s thoughtful gesture and shows us how “tiny little things” can make a huge difference.

In terms of his university experience, Potter did not think his gay identity had any impact on his academic performance. He said, “I never say on grant or award applications that I am an LGBTQ2S+ person coz my research isn’t in that space, so I don’t think it [is] a relevant factor.” A student threw a harsh question at Potter after he was granted two prominent awards, “Do you think you won those awards because you identify as gay?” Potter was unprepared to respond to that and had to take a moment to process this unfriendly assumption that made him uncomfortable. This instance happened at a virtual meeting during a class he was the teaching assistant, and some students expressed their disbelief by using the reaction function on Zoom. Potter was pleased that one student showed their support through private chat, and the professor checked in with him after the class and followed up with the person who made that comment individually. Potter said, “They didn’t address it in the Zoom call, which I think would have been beneficial.” However, he still appreciated the decision made at the time. Although this experience did not affect his program, Potter was shocked by this blatant attack and commented,

“In my mind, when people win that are indigenous, BIPOC, neurodiverse, LGBTQ2S+, [it] should be celebrated, don’t go after them because you assume that they won because of something out of their control.” Despite the professor trying to make things right, Potter did not hear anything back from that student after the intervention. Potter chose not to go through the formal procedure to file a complaint, as suggested by a student who was really upset by what happened. He said, “I didn’t have the energy, and I am not a very confrontational person.”

Potter did not realize there was a Q Centre until recently, which is most frequented by undergraduate 2SLGBTQI+ students. He said, “I don’t really pay enough attention to [2SLGBTQI+] spaces on campus.” He wanted to enter that space and talk to people there, but it was closed due to the pandemic. He thought the Q Centre could have more “campus reach” as he noticed it had not been well advertised. Potter also thought there should be an equivalent space for graduate students, saying, “Graduate students are at a very different phase of life, and usually we have families and other commitments like we are a bit further along.” He said he wanted to have the ability to bring his partner to a place on campus that has other 2SLGBTQI+ people. Although Potter was aware of GSA Square’s existence, he did not attend any of their events as he described himself as a “newbie” who only came out several years ago. Potter believed that there should be more spaces designated for 2SLGBTQI+ students that meet different needs, such as “recreational” and “mental health and well-being.” Potter had no negative experience with the Wellness Centre because he has never used its service. Still, he thought it could improve its practices as he heard people having negative experiences. He said, “I don’t know anyone that has gone to the wellness center that is LGBTQ2S+ had a positive experience; I don’t think there are any staff members there that are LGBTQ2S+.”

Potter thought the campus was safe for gender and sexually diverse people. Yet, he acknowledged that people who are non-white and non-male may have different perceptions of safety levels on campus. Potter felt comfortable calling campus security when something happened and found them respectful and appropriate. Potter had more negative experiences off campus than being on campus in terms of his gay identity. However, things were not always that beautiful. Potter recalled kissing his partner on campus and finding a person glaring at them as he turned around. Potter said that some people mimicked his “gay voices” and hand gestures, such as “Oh my god, stop it/ oh my god, I hate that”. Although Potter did not personally find these behaviors offensive, his partner was irritated and felt uncomfortable when such things occurred. Potter felt his partner had been treated differently at a campus trivia event. They told the story, “They were questioning every single answer he gave, but they would never do with other people, only with him.” Eventually, Potter’s partner stopped contributing to the answers, and they two left the scene. Potter’s partner pursued a career outside academia; Potter had to deal with some people’s disrespectful judgments of his partner’s profession, educational background, and compatibility with him.

Potter’s past “don’t ask, don’t tell” Catholic workplace environment was not friendly and welcoming towards 2SLGBTQI+ people. In contrast, Potter’s university experience was overwhelmingly positive. On a scale of one to ten, Potter gave 8.5 out of 10 regarding the overall acceptance and openness level on campus. “I only came out to my family after becoming a UCalgary student because I felt comfortable enough at school,” Potter said he would have never come out publicly if he had continued his former job. He envisioned that more progress would occur as the dialogue and research about 2SLGBTQI+ issues continue. At the same time, he expressed his concern for closeted students on campus,



Are they getting the help they need? Do they even feel comfortable asking questions? Are they dropping out of university because they have so much internal strife because they can't come to terms with their sexual identity or sexual preferences? Are they getting the support they need in their friend groups to process this moment in their lives?

Potter's questions cast spotlights on the very hardships 2SLGBTQI+ students may have to cope with. He thought it was hard to come out even in a supportive environment. He said, "I can't imagine coming out in a non-supportive environment."

Potter thought tiny gestures, such as rolling one's eyes or asking how a person's partner is doing, can impact people more than people realize in positive or negative ways. He said, "The little things really matter, whether that's a positive little thing or negative little thing. Either micro affirmations or microaggressions, they both matter. There's nothing too small." He added, "If you want to be an ally to the community, and you just don't know how, it's wonderful if you just ask them how their partner is doing, or if you respect their pronouns or if you put a safe space sticker on your office door." Potter could identify every single faculty member who had one of those stickers because he took note of them and knew where they all were. Potter said coming out can be a constant task for a 2SLGBTQI+ person, especially when they meet new people. Potter recalled how a member from his cohort showed support by complimenting Potter's partner's homemade food when he was coming out to a new person.

Potter thought throwing all the responsibilities onto the shoulders of 2SLGBTQI+ people could be energy-consuming for them. He made a comment,

I just think, especially members from the (LGBT2S+) community that have experienced trauma, or are still working through trauma, or have just recently come out, or are in the process of coming out to people, they're often the most vocal because they are either

trying to prevent trauma from happening to other people, so they take on a lot of emotional labor in the sense that they try and protect other people from what they experienced.

Potter argued that the advocacy stems from a desire to prevent other from experiencing similar harm, undertaking tremendous emotional labor in the process. Potter admitted that it took him time to process before conversing with me. He said, “That’s a big thing, especially for people who research the community, that are in the community, there’s multiple layers of stress.”

Potter shared his perspectives on the overall political climate in Alberta as a person who was born and grew up here. He commented, “If Texas and Florida had a baby, that is Alberta.” In many ways, his metaphor captures the social conservatism deeply rooted in this province. Potter thought the current UCP government had given people the “permission” to be more intolerant. He argued that this top-down conservative movement would have destructive impacts on UCalgary’s administration, and 2SLGBTQI+ people would be more likely to be negatively affected. Potter believed higher education could provide 2SLGBTQI+ students spaces to meet new people and find a sense of belonging. He said, “I know for some people it’s their first time meeting other 2SLGBTQI+ people, especially if they’re postsecondary students from rural settings moving into cities for the first time.” Potter noted that while the campus may be a safe environment overall, the surrounding city is not. He said, “Calgary as a place is hit and miss for LGBTQ2S+ people. By and large, I haven’t had any issues, but I’ve had people spit at me, [and] I had people swear at me.”

Potter hoped that 2SLGBTQI+ faculty members could receive more support from the university and deserve more features so that people could learn more about their work and research. he said, “There are so many opportunities for growth in terms of equity, diversity, and

inclusion at U of C.” Potter appreciated that the University of Calgary is making a conscious effort, though it is certainly not perfect; however, he believed that compared with other institutions, there are more work and acknowledgments to be done. He said, “I know sometimes it’s awkward, and sometimes it’s difficult, but there is a movement. It’s a slow movement. I’d like it to move a little faster.” Potter stressed that the 2SLGBTQI+ community is dominated by the perspectives of cisgender white people, and racialized 2SLGBTQI+ people may be subject to both racism and homophobia. He stated that the voices of Indigenous and BIPOC people should be heard.

Avery is a first-year genderqueer student at the University of Calgary who identifies as bisexual and queer. They were 18 and had lived in Calgary their whole life. When asked about their university experience as a gender and sexual minority, they said, “It’s pretty good, actually; I feel like that’s the first thing I should say; I think our university is doing a great job being inclusive and stuff like that.” Avery’s family was not that supportive when it came to the 2SLGBTQI+ stuff and kept an eye on with whom Avery was hanging out. One nice thing about the university for Avery was that they could find excuses to be on campus, which offered them a little freedom to control their day. Avery thought that the campus was a safe and inclusive environment for gender and sexual minority students and individuals. Avery rated 9.5 out of 10 for the overall quality of life at the University of Calgary.

Avery gave a lot of credit to their Introductory English course; they said, “English 203 is doing really good with inclusion.” Avery remembered there was an openly queer character in one book, and nobody had a problem with that, besides, they also learned about feminism, gender theory, and queer theory. They thought the overall atmosphere in this class was very open. In comparison, Avery was shocked that there was no mention of anything or anybody 2SLGBTQI+

at all in their history introductory class. Avery emphasized that representation is important, and there should have been opportunities for good discussions on 2SLGBTQI+ topics and issues. “It doesn’t necessarily have to be like every single book is about LGBTQ issues, but I would like to see more.”

Avery indicated that professors rarely make assumptions and often use inclusive language. However, they also noticed that things like referring to class as ladies and gentlemen and assuming pronouns sometimes still occurred, which made them feel excluded. Avery believed that the professors were trying their best to foster an inclusive environment, though “a few little things” can be further improved. Avery recalled an incident that took place during a course group chat for a course on Discord. An individual typed in, “The Bible says homosexuality and pedophilia are both bad.” Avery was not cool with that line and replied with a sad face emoji. Avery thought it would have been nice if the teaching assistant could notice and call out this as homophobia. Avery had social anxiety, so they purposefully avoided talking to people. They managed to make a few queer friends with shared similar identities. Avery felt better and energized when they hung out with their friends. “You know, a meter gets filled, my fuel gets filled, I have the power to do things better.”

Avery felt very stressed and irritated because the name function did not apply to all university portals and services, and their deadname would still show up, for example, on D2L. It was nerve-racking for Avery when people addressed them by their deadname. Avery found it exhausting to contact IT or do paperwork to get their name recognized, which would also involve outing themselves again and again.

The closure of the Q Centre during the pandemic was challenging for Avery, and they had been waiting for the announcement of the reopening of the Q Centre. Avery was very impressed

with the work those 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus were doing and they felt included at the Q Centre and QOC. Avery was able to make friends, and they said there were official, unofficial, and social events of different themes hosted by these groups. Avery commented, “I think they’re doing a fantastic job with the different services they’re providing and the work they do.” Avery did not support the idea of segregating and dividing the 2SLGBTQI+ community based on age or undergraduate/graduate program.

Avery thought higher education opens the gate for 2SLGBTQI+ students to gain opportunities and resources. They also said that the biggest pitfall was the exorbitant tuition fees. They said, “Just letting people go to university without shelling over \$30,000 or \$70,000 or whatever.” Avery proposed that there should be a good mix of both single-stall and multiple-stall gender-neutral washrooms. Avery shared what they would want the people outside the community to know about 2SLGBTQI+ people,

We’re just normal. We’re not attention seekers or freaks or anything like that. We’re just people trying to live our lives and do what makes us happiest and most comfortable. We have no agenda. Our agenda is like, give us rights, like, don’t kill us. We’re not trying to covert anybody. It’s not a sickness. We’re just trying to live and be happy. That’s it.

This is Avery’s straightforward message for the general public about the normalcy and humanity of 2SLGBTQI+ individuals.

Mary is a cisgender bisexual student, and she said that her campus life was pretty good, and she did not have any negative experiences related to her sexual identity. She thought she was privileged as she explained, “As a white person who isn’t obviously queer in any way, that protects me from a lot of potential, like harassment or discrimination that I know a lot of other people face, not just on campus, but also in the world.” Mary thought that people would make

assumptions about people's sexual orientation and/or gender identity when the way they present themselves is different from the social norms. She said that people whose pronouns are them tend to have negative experiences. Mary believed that there was still room for improvement in terms of inclusive spaces and washrooms.

Regarding queer spaces on campus, Mary heard about the Q Centre from her friend who volunteered there. Although she had been to the Q Centre, she was not involved with it. She had an impression that it was a lovely space from the mouth of her friend who volunteered there. She did not have the opportunity to attend its events due to COVID-19. Mary hoped that the Q Centre would receive more funding from the university and gain more publicity. She thought this would give students what they need on campus and allow the Q centre to organize events and advocate for students. Mary also wished that there would be more 2SLGBTQI+ events on campus because she could not see them on posters or in newsletters, which made her feel a bit disconnected from the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Mary knew no specific programs, groups or policies for gender and sexually diverse students. She knew the Q Centre and the EDI committee. She once volunteered for the WRC and thought it was a very 2SLGBTQI+-friendly space. However, she thought it hard to find it due to its location, which is on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of MacEwan Student Hall. "A lot of my friends didn't even know it existed."

Apart from one women's studies course, Mary did not recall much classroom discussion related to 2SLGBTQI+ issues, which she agreed should be discussed. "I think it's important to have that awareness about life experiences that either relate to you." Mary thought that it is important to include 2SLGBTQI+ content in materials and curricula. She said that her professors had been doing well in teaching 2SLGBTQI+ issues. Mary thought that including 2SLGBTQI+ topics depends on the professors' willingness and acceptance. Mary noticed that some teachers

and students would use gender-neutral terms like partner, they/them while others would use binary ones such as boyfriend or girlfriend, he/him, she/her.

Mary had a pride sticker on the back of her laptop, yet sometimes she felt a little uncomfortable opening it up in class or the library. “it’s never been anything overt, but it’s just like, feels a little bit nerve-wracking sometimes.” When asked what made her feel that way, she explained that there is a very wide range of views among the large student population on campus, and some of them can be dangerous for her or people in the 2SLGBTQI+ community. She was uncertain about how people might react to different genders and sexual expressions or minorities. Fortunately, Mary did not witness or experience any harassment or discriminatory incidents outside the classroom. She thought that compared with other public spaces in Calgary, the campus was relatively safe for gender and sexually diverse students because the university focuses on diversity and inclusion. She assumed that people who are visibly queer or gender nonconforming would feel a bit more comfortable being on campus than being in a random space downtown.

While Mary struggled with her mental health and well-being, she liked the university, her classes, and the people she met. Mary thought it hard to meet and connect with like-minded students on campus, especially after COVID-19, for which she blamed the transition to virtual class on Zoom. However, she pointed out that students could stay in their own “little safe bubble” by taking online classes to avoid being in a physical space where other people might discriminate against them. She observed that nearly 50% of people (mainly students) included gender pronouns in their Zoom display names, which was more than she would have expected. Mary believed it is important to respect people’s gender pronouns but acknowledged that using gender pronouns may not apply to certain circumstances. “I think having the opportunity to

choose if you want to give your pronouns is important because some people don't want to because they don't think that's a reasonable request, and then some people aren't comfortable telling their pronouns because they're not out."

Mary thought that people who go to university or choose higher education are likely to be left-leaning, which could create a safer space for people from smaller towns or conservative families. Mary also thought it was easier to make connections on campus, which can be helpful for people. "There are so many people on campus, you're likely to find at least one person who agrees with you or shares the same perspective, and you can create a friendship in that way."

Mary thought that visibility was one of the main issues facing 2SLGBTQI+ students. She said, "It's always helpful to see older people like you, you know, thriving and doing well and having their own lives and know that you can get there as well." Mary hoped to see more queer representation on campus that can be helpful for vulnerable people who do not receive family acceptance or face other barriers. "Like how [you know] that you're going to be able to succeed and do well in life and, move out of whatever potential negative environment you're in if you don't see other people who are living that life?" Mary was stuck in her room for that past year and said there should be more opportunities for 2SLGBTQI+ folks to meet each other. Mary observed that there was not enough gender-neutral washrooms. "Personally, it would be good to make like every washroom just gender neutral."

At the very end of our conversation, Mary briefly talked about the issues that exist within the 2SLGBTQI+ community, namely—misassumptions about bisexual people and racism from white queer people. She shared,

I don't know what it's called, like bi means two, right? But like, for me, it doesn't mean that I am only attracted to men and women, there are other genders, all genders, that I'm



attracted to. I think a lot of people have that misconception that if you're bi, it's the two, and then you're pan, it's everybody.

Mary's comment once again clarifies a common misconception about bisexuality, explaining the attraction extends to all genders, not just men and women. She noted the confusion between bisexuality and pansexuality, emphasizing the broader inclusivity of their attraction.

Eren is genderqueer student in music who identifies with multiple sexual orientations. They were serving as an executive for QOC for the past three years and they devoted a lot of their time for this role because they enjoyed it. They thought that the university was a pretty good place to be queer and trans. They did not think that their gender and sexual identity impacted their day-to-day experiences. Eren liked classes that involved gender and sexuality, such as gender and sexuality studies, sociology, or history.

Eren said that they had seen 2SLGBTQI+-related issues being purposefully included by some good professors, and they had not been aware of those topics being explicitly avoided. Eren was always happy to see 2SLGBTQI+ representation in the course material. They said, "It tells me that prof is probably a safe person to talk to and to be open with. Not that they always get it 100% right, but at least I know that they have good intentions." In the survey, Eren reported that professors sometimes make assumptions and use non-inclusive language in instruction. People who make disrespectful remarks are rarely dealt with properly, making the classroom less safe for Eren to express themselves. "I cringe every time I hear like gender being equated with voices thing in that people will assume that someone who sings and speaks in a high register is a woman and someone in a low register is a man."

Eren recounted a situation where people referred to their section by using guys or men, and failed to realize that there were transgender individuals who did not identify as male.

Although Eren did not think it was intentional aggression, they were not okay with that, as they said, “That makes [it] an uncomfortable place to be if you don’t match their expectations.” Eren preferred finding a private and appropriate situation to bring the issues to people’s attention. Eren appreciated that most of the other students and staff were usually open to being corrected, saying, “We’re all there to learn; we usually assume good things about each other, you know; I assume that they didn’t mean to say anything hurtful.” Eren said that the follow-ups usually went decently, though they were uncertain if they could always reach them and make themselves understood. Eren did not think that these experiences affected their educational performance. “I pass as a man, which I’m comfortable with, so I don’t experience the same kind of scrutiny that other people might.”

Eren wished to see more gender-neutral washrooms on campus because they thought there were not enough. They said, “Everyone celebrated when we got gender-neutral washrooms in Mac Hall. We celebrate every time there’s a new gender-neutral washroom.” They also thought that people should gain easier access to gender-neutral washrooms “There needs to be a gender-neutral washroom close by at any time, and in some places on campus, there isn’t.” Another thing that came to Eren’s mind was his name. He said that some professors were very aware of using his name, some had to be reminded many times not to use their old name.

“My experience and perspective are that the majority of people on campus are supportive, and unfortunately, there’s a small and angry minority of people that are homophobic and transphobic. I just do my best not to run into them.” Eren said that sometimes they would paint the rocks on campus for pride or other events in rainbow colours, and there were multiple times that their paint was covered with homophobic messages. Eren remembered that one of the messages was “stop the gay communism,” and they interpreted this as more of a political attack

rather than a homophobic attack. Eren said that there was another incident that took place a few years. Some posts from QOC caught a lot of attention because they were commenting on local politics, homophobia, and local politicians. Two people showed up at one of their meetings in a public space and photographed the meeting attendees without their permission. “We confronted them, and they were pretty verbally abusive to us.” The security arrived and escorted these people out of the building, but Eren and their people were informed that the security could not escort them off campus. Eren and the other members were furious that people who harassed them were allowed to stay. Eren described an uncomfortable and potentially threatening circumstance where campus security failed to adequately address concerns about harassment,

They were waiting right outside the door when we left, which was not a comfortable situation. They did let them just stay on campus. They continued filming and trying to follow people. I feel like campus security did not take that as seriously as they should have.

Being a transgender person made Eren very aware of microaggressions, but they felt safe and protected. They went on to say, “I know that’s not universal among other trans people, and I’m in the lucky position of being white and passing.” Eren thought the campus was physically safe for gender and sexually diverse students, and they were not afraid of physical violence. However, the more pressing issue for them was true inclusion, “like emotionally safe just to be your entire self on campus”. Eren found it easy to find like-minded people on campus, but they also said there were many unconnected people.

Eren was well-informed on 2SLGBTQI+ campus organizations. They said, “I guess the Q Centre is really the main other queer-specific support avenue.” Eren also mentioned that some places, such as WRC, the Wellness Centre, and the Writing Symbols Lodge, are not queer-

focused but are queer-friendly. Eren thought that these queer groups on campus were “doing pretty good work”. They gave an example, “The Q Centre usually does a peer support program. There are lots of opportunities to volunteer and be involved.” Eren believed that advocacy and support for students should come primarily from students. They elaborated, “Instead of hiring full-time staff from outside to direct or control campus groups, the university should just provide support to existing groups, particularly the ones run by students.”

In terms of challenges 2SLGBTQI+ students are facing at the University of Calgary, Eren shared that they found themselves mostly bothered by microaggressions and there’s a lack of overt support and protection for gender and sexually diverse students and individuals. Eren hoped to see more queer-specific information and resources could be made available for students like the Safe Walk program. When asked how their campus experiences impacted their life, Eren said,

I come from a small rural community where I didn’t know anyone else that was like me, and I wasn’t exposed to other queer people. It’s been mostly positive that the campus has been a great place for me to find myself and my community. I also really value the community that is there because that’s how you heal from all the things that you bring with [you] from other parts of your life.

Obviously, UCalgary provided a supportive environment for Eren to discover their identity and find a community where they can meet like-minded individuals after coming from a place where they felt isolated.

Eren had pleasant experiences with staff members at the Wellness Centre. “As far as I’m aware, all the counselors are quite well-informed and queer-friendly. [Doctors and nurses] have always been pretty good at providing inclusive and equal healthcare services.” Eren hoped that

people could obtain a prescription for hormone replacement therapy<sup>2</sup> (HRT) from the Wellness Centre. Eren could get refills from the Wellness Centre but was unsure how they would react or respond to the first-time seekers. Eren said that acquiring transgender-inclusive and friendly medical care and services is the main issue facing many transgender people. Eren thought there would still be improvements if the Wellness Centre wanted to be at the edge of transgender inclusivity. They also wished the Wellness Centre could offer trans-specific care, such as affirming surgeries.

Eren believed everyone should have access to higher education because the university is ideal for the community. Eren said the culture and atmosphere could differ across different programs and faculties, “I’ve never really had any terribly bad experiences in the faculty of arts, but I know people, for instance, have had much worse experiences, like engineering students.” In addition, Eren thought people would no longer feel comfortable in their program if their colleagues were not accepting. Although Eren believed that the university didn’t have “complete control” over the opinions of its students and staff, he stated that the university should “express overt support and use intentionally inclusive language of all time” to support 2SLGBTQI+ students. Finally, Eren hoped the name policy would be fully implemented.

Wally is a cisgender gay student pursuing a master’s program at the University of Calgary. At the very beginning of our dialogue, he said that he was aware that he possesses some privileges, “being cisgender, white, and male”. He said his campus life was good but recognized some structural barriers. Wally rated 5 out of 10 for UCalgary’s LGBTQ2S friendliness. “I gave them a medium average score. I don’t know they’re necessarily the worst, [and] I don’t think they’re necessarily the best. But I definitely think that it could improve on some things.” The

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<sup>2</sup> A hormone replacement therapy that is part of some transgender people’s gender transition process.

greatest barrier Wally had to overcome to achieve educational success was managing the consequences of discrimination within the gay community itself. Wally was also hyper-vigilant about what was happening in the political world and his former church. Besides, Wally also had some learning disabilities, such as ADHD, and it was difficult for him to pay attention to his studies while processing all these challenges.

In the survey, Wally reported that professors never made assumptions and often used inclusive language of instruction. He told me most of his professors had been respectful, and he had been in classroom discussions where 2SLGBTQI+ issues were purposefully included. However, Wally noticed some pushback from people regarding applying gender and sexuality-based studies and theories to his field of topic. Wally was grateful that his supervisor had been 100% behind him as he said, “I don’t believe my sexual orientation has ever been an issue.” Wally thought most of his colleagues had been supportive and understanding, saying, “When we talk about LGBTQ2S+ stuff, they say affirming things.” Although Wally thought creating an inviting classroom climate is a shared responsibility between students and professors, he argued that instructors have more duty because “they’re the ones moderating the conversations, bringing points and counterpoints.” Wally also thought it was important that the professor intervene when students make offensive and ignorant comments about 2SLGBTQI+ issues. He then added that it should be dealt with properly if something extremely disruptive happens, such as constant misgendering or unacceptable use of names. He said, “If the person isn’t willing to make amends and correct their behavior, report them to whatever authorities are necessary.”

Wally only came out of the closet about five years ago, and he was still processing his identity as a gay man. He said, “I’m still kind of processing some of the former beliefs that I previously held as a practicing member of the church of Jesus Christ of Saint Latter Days.” Some

of Wally's positions on 2SLGBTQI+ issues did not change immediately, as he explained, "It didn't just change overnight, even though I'm no longer a Mormon, I'm no longer a member of my old previous faith, you know, you're still exploring this coming out journey." Wally had to examine the consequences of coming out, such as ex-communication and strained family relationships, before he decided to engage in sexual relations with a man. Wally thought his 2SLGBTQI+ identity had helped him understand and see the nuance of alternative arguments. He also said, "I think my education here at the university has helped give me reasons to challenge myself and ask, scholarly, as objective as I can questions of myself about my positions." Wally did not know if some of his positions would have evolved without having received the training at the University of Calgary to question his assumptions. And he said, "It's mixed; I've had positive and negative experiences as a result of my being as a student here and as a gay cis man."

When asked about the inclusion level on campus for gender and sexual minority students and individuals, Wally was honest that he could only speak to the acceptance level of homosexual men because he said, "I'm not transgender, non-binary or bisexual, it's difficult for me to comment on the experiences of people who identify in that way." He thought the campus climate was inclusive, but there were still issues. He had seen both good and bad things. He remembered that some crazy minister interrupted a meeting of the GSA2 and filmed committee members. "It was invading their security and making people feel unsafe." The campus security escorted that individual off; however, Wally thought the university should have taken legal action against that person. He then added, "There should have been an official statement given or more to be done to discourage actors from doing that."

Regarding the 2SLGBTQI+ groups on campus, Wally knew the GSA2 of the Graduate Student Association, of which he is a member. He also said there was a mentoring program between 2SLGBTQI+ students and faculty or senior students. Wally knew about Sex Week, QOC, and the Q Centre which he described as “a safe space on campus for undergrads.” Wally observed that there were conflicts and “internal fighting” within and among these 2SLGBTQI+ groups in terms of different issues and topics in the 2SLGBTQI+ community. Wally recounted that there was a heated exchange between two 2SLGBTQI+ people of ethnic minorities. Wally tried to mediate the escalation but felt unsafe and uncomfortable. He said, “That made me a little bit frightened to intervene in the future.” Wally also admitted that he did not know what he was supposed to do as a cisgender, white, gay man. He shared his concern, “I’m sure it’s easy as a cis white male gay guy for me to not always understand where my privileges are coming forward, to be unaware of an issue, to make a mistake. And I’m afraid that at that point, it’s going to be like, no one wants anything to do with me. I’m now toxic.” Wally said certain elements of the 2SLGBTQI+ culture scared and reminded him of his former Church.

Wally thought the campus was “moderately” safe for gender and sexually diverse students. He stressed, “It’s difficult because it’s how we define safe, right? I don’t know if complete safety can be guaranteed for anyone because it’s more about how we respond when harms occur.” Wally felt unsafe and reluctant to talk about his views on some 2SLGBTQI+ issues in front of his more politically progressive mates because of his conservative-leaning position. Wally said his university experiences made him try to be more conscientious about what he says or does. Wally thought gaining access to 2SLGBTQI+ resources was good, but he did not know the specific demands and priorities and wanted to see more available resources.



In Wally's experience, most medical providers on campus have been professional and respectful. However, he was unhappy that his request to put a poster at the Wellness Centre was refused by them. Wally said he was helping to organize an event that taught how to conduct kink and BDSM safely during Sex Week. An original poster designed for this event featuring a male professional in a jockstrap received a lot of backlashes, even from some socially conservative members of the GSA2. Wally thought blamed this pushback for the heteronormative and patriarchal culture. He said, "People sometimes tend to be more accepting of women or female-identifying figures wearing less or posing themselves in a sexy way, whereas they are more likely to be reluctant to be more accepting of a male-identifying person exposing themselves." Wally was also frustrated that both the university and the GSA denied the request to display their official logos on that poster. The reason they provided was that "the poster was too sexually explicit, what he was wearing, and how much he was revealing." Finally, a redesigned poster showing bondage gear was accepted.

Wally believed that if more 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and groups engage in higher education, they could learn more about the knowledge of lived experiences, alternative views, and theories, and they are more likely to find job security. He said, "We're able to understand ourselves in the world around us in a way that is affirming and beneficial to society." Wally thought that it was very important for 2SLGBTQI+ people to receive higher education to support themselves, become competitive in the employment market, and represent themselves in highly gainful positions that provide leadership in their fields. Wally believed that 2SLGBTQI+ people could help change the system by being part of higher education. He said, "If we're not at the table, it's hard to change. Those are institutional barriers."

Wally pointed out that the intersectionality of multiple identities and statuses could have compounding impacts on 2SLGBTQI+ students' experiences. Wally also said that exposure to 2SLGBTQI+ may be a cultural shock for some students who may come from a foreign culture or country. Wally remembered that at one film screening event, the kissing scene of two lesbian characters scared away many foreign students. That was a hurtful experience for Wally, but at the same time, he also worried about the safety of his international friends identifying as 2SLGBTQI+ within their own cultural or religious community.

Wally would hope to see more graduate training and lectures about managing current and past trauma related to discrimination based on sexual and gender identities for those who are affected by the trauma, administrators, and policymakers. Wally could not get Pre-exposure prophylaxis<sup>3</sup> (PrEP) on campus, and he believed that no one had been licensed to provide the service. Wally would also like to see more gender-neutral washrooms on campus because he thought this kind of washroom could provide not only safety and comfort for transgender/gender-nonconforming people but also privacy for any other students. Wally would like to see more designated spaces for 2SLGBTQI+ students, particularly graduate students because graduate students do not have their own spaces. Wally thought hiring more full-time employees to run 2SLGBTQI+ centers would allow consistency in policy and permanence of discussing 2SLGBTQI+ issues and, more importantly, alleviate the juggling of one's duties as a graduate student, researcher, and volunteer within these organizations.

Finally, Wally shared more of his perspectives and struggles,

Life is complex. We have to be aware of things, and I admit, part of the issue that makes this difficult is I'm so scared of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong

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<sup>3</sup> Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is a highly effective HIV prevention strategy that HIV-negative people can use to lower their chance of getting HIV.

thing. That's a constant fear of mine; I don't know how to resolve it. It's a constant fear to know how to engage appropriately and educate myself, but also engage from what limited understanding I have, and it's complex.

Wally acknowledged the complexity of life and the challenges of engaging appropriately in sensitive conversations. He expressed his fear of making mistakes while balancing self-education with limited understanding.

### ***Kilt's Extraordinarily Difficult Journey***

How did I get away from my parents? I fled to a shelter; I was there for 3 days. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, they said I had too many mental health problems and took the cops in to take me to the psychiatric ward — Kilt

Kilt, who identifies as a cisgender woman, called herself a “butch” lesbian, a term most often used to describe a lesbian who exhibits a masculine appearance or behavior. At the age of 19, Kilt embarked on a long “coming out to the world” journey before pursuing her program at the University of Calgary. “My campus life now is much more different than my campus life when I was a kid”. She noticed that the university was “dropping the ball” everywhere. She explained that she felt so scared and threatened as a closeted kid and she did not feel strong enough to be herself, whereas now she said, “I feel like I'm fighting now. I'm mean dyke and a powerful enough person, so I can just face it head on.” Kilt did not feel safe on campus as a queer person, especially due to the closure of the Q Centre for Covid. There was no physical space where she could visit and “take off the armor”. Although identifying herself as an atheist, Kilt said that her queerness was supported at the FSC in her own words, “the closest to a queer space on campus” where she did not need to hide because people there were “assertively affirming, and it really picked up the Q Centre slack”.

The word “hostile” appeared multiple times at the beginning of our conversation regarding Kilt’s campus life. She felt that she was in fighting mode while searching for the “safe zones”. Having grown up in Calgary as a “baby queer person”, Kilt thought that the city was still homophobic because she still encountered street harassment and to others. Teachers at school used to misgender her all the time because of her tomboy vibes, and they would not intervene when Kilt was being physically and psychologically bullied and harassed by other students. Kilt’s teachers made some disrespectful comments, “If you were not so weird, this wouldn’t happen to you. If you weren’t socially unacceptable, this wouldn’t happen to you.” She felt that she was being constantly threatened. Unfortunately, Kilt’s parents were not supportive, either. She described them as “brutal people and bad parents”. “I was hyper-vigilant the whole time in my childhood. My life has always been a fight. My parents hated me from birth; I was born wrong. The context of Calgary at the time, everyone was talking about gay people being disgusting or dangerous, or whatever”. The feelings of self-disgust came from various conditions she was born with. “I literally stopped eating because I didn’t want to hit puberty and have something I need to lie about, coz I was like I thought that would be the fucking nail in the coffin. I thought that my parents would finally murder me if they found out [I was gay]. I was very much focused on not getting murdered actively every day in my life.” Kilt was forced to deal with both homophobia and discrimination associated with her disabilities.

Kilt feared that she may not receive full acceptance even in queer spaces. “I don’t have the privileges of experiencing vulnerabilities.” She said, “I care so much about being rational because for me, my only right to existence was that I could perform academically; that was the only thing that made me worth feeding, clothing, keeping in a roof.” Kilt thought she should not feel love and compassion because she needed to be able to make tough decisions. She explained,

“I needed to become that powerful person, and I needed to be able to fight. I needed to be physically powerful because I was already at such a disadvantage, and I knew it.” Kilt did not meet the social expectations for femininity and masculinity. She was incapable of stopping people—her parent or random other people, from hurting her. The other boys and girls treated Kilt harshly during her childhood. She shared, “You know, a lot of tomboy girls that grew up to be butch lesbians have this experience in their life where everyone is attacking them for being masculine all the time.”

Kilt went to Vancouver hoping that life could become better as she said, “queer people, you grow up and leave your homophobic environment and go somewhere else, and that’s the solution. Kilt thought that Vancouver in 2012 was much queerer affirming than Calgary right now. Going to the university spared Kilt from his parents, yet she was still triggered when being asked her pronouns by queer people, which she associated as a threat due to her experience of being bullied in the past. The whole context impacted how she navigated campus life as she explained, “I was extremely suicidal my whole life, mentally ill, and I literally tried to kill myself every day. I thought I was a detrimental human race by existing; I thought I was literally taking resources I didn’t deserve.” Kilt was convinced that she would be dangerous and would hurt other people. She said, “I was morally responsible to die because I couldn’t control what I was feeling. I sucked killing myself, so that wasn’t great. I have a lot of shame around being too weak to die.” The mental health crisis Kilt was going through forced her to drop out of the university.

Kilt escaped her abusive family and had been out of that house for a couple of years. She was surviving on student loans for a long time. She continued, “Then I couldn’t because I couldn’t perform academically anymore. I was also not even close to redeeming myself as a

human because I couldn't get a degree, I couldn't get a job, I couldn't work, I was crazy." Kilt carried all these traumatic experiences into the university as she said,

It's still hostile to me, it's not all the PTSD, it's like, places, the world, but especially the university needs to be equipped and proactive about helping people with really fucked up childhoods. The university is your ticket to safety, that's what the world tells you, anything I read online, go to college if you can go to college.

The brutal and tragic murder of Matthew Shepard was real for Kilt as she said, "I have [experienced] hate crime, not like that, but enough..." Kilt had encountered different dangerous situations because people perceived her to be queer as a kid. She then explained, "I still can't escape that fear. My sanity improved greatly when I decided I don't care if people kill me today. As a child, I didn't have the option to just be like, I am going to walk into the world, I am not going to give a shit if I die. I can't let fear define what I do because I just won't exist if I do that, there is no point in living."

Coming back to Calgary was hard for Kilt, though she said she noticed that the messaging and climate have changed a bit compared to what it was in the past. She described, "Now you could read about a queer person that doesn't die. You can have sex [education] class where they're not just talking about how AIDS can kill you. As a kid, what you internalize, being homosexual is going to get you dead." Kilt's parents failed to provide a safe space for her at that time, which did not help at all with her internalized homophobia. "Every time I see people, I have to figure out if they are going to hurt me right now or later. That's how I see the world; that's how I grew up seeing the world."

Kilt thought there was no obvious support when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the campus. It was hard for her to access peer support, which caused her emotional turmoil. She said, "The

university really dropped the ball on queer inclusion.” Although Kilt registered her name on the UCalgary portal, this function did not apply to many university services. Kilt still saw her dead name when logging onto Zoom and D2L and was called deadname by the advisor as well, which took a heavy toll on her well-being because her deadname can be very emotionally triggering and would bring her back into the state of being a vulnerable person who gets hurt and even killed. “Having people in authority call me by my deadname is horrible.” Kilt was unhappy with the university’s approach to persuading students to change their legal names. It was exhausting for Kilt to repeatedly request name changes for each service. Apparently, this was not a “shoe” that fits all sizes.

The 30 correspondence emails Kilt wrote to change her displayed name did not fix this “tiny” problem, which was a hurtful experience for her. She complained, “This name shit is icing on the cake, I’m so angry all the time.” In addition, professors were not able to understand Kilt as being a queer person and her perceptions of social services. These negative experiences added to Kilt’s stress level, which was already extremely high. Kilt was also coping with some health conditions. She said, “I have attempted suicide so many times while writing assignments; trying to write a paper gives me flashbacks to trying to kill myself.” Fortunately, Kilt did not experience any harassment outside the classrooms.

“They don’t really talk about queer issues; I’ve had a lot of victimization from social workers and mental health professionals.” That’s why Kilt chose social work because she wanted to change that about social work. She said, “I want people like me to be supported and understood and make things just a little bit easier. I’ve experienced so much homophobia within social services, just the subtle shit.” Kilt did not know whom she could go to for reconciling being queer in the mental health field. She said,

It's still homophobic. They just are. I feel like even if no one says anything about queer people, that's already a microaggression. You don't feel you have the right to be here if they don't assertively make it okay to be gay. It's like you can fly under the radar versus thriving, being an open part of the campus community.

Kilt discussed the pervasive homophobia on campus, noting that silence on queer issues itself functions as an attack. They argue that without clear support, queer students may feel they can only survive rather than thrive in the campus community.

Kilt took a course—working with 2SLGBTQI+ communities in social work which she said was a really good class. The professor was queer and there was a non-binary student. That was a healing experience for Kilt because she could share with people what she had been through, feeling welcomed, respected, and understood. “In this one context, in this one course that was specific to 2SLGBTQI+ people, because the prof is queer, it was really valuable.” Kilt said that the 2SLGBTQI+ content was “glossed over” in other courses she took. As she described, “Even they are trying, they are just not queer, they don't know it, they don't get it, and they didn't invite anybody else to talk about it.” Kilt asserted that queer people should be given more opportunities and space to talk about queer topics and issues. “Being queer in your profession, and how it's relevant to your profession in social work. It's critical.” Kilt said that social work assignments were always reflections of oneself and one's life. Her inner struggle was, “It is my queerness, and my existence is my course material, which makes it hell when teachers teaching social work diversity don't know how to help me navigate that or help navigate that because they don't have enough experience with it.”

Kilt signed up for a group project focusing on heterosexism in a virtual class. Despite having respectful groupmates who were very open to learning and let Kilt take the lead, it turned



out that one of her classmates was homophobic. Kilt shared why she found it important to have gay-straight alliances in schools based on her own experiences, yet a peer student challenged her. They said, “My son is in school; they have a sign for sex ED; I don’t want him to learn about that; what are they hiding?” The professors neither intervened nor checked in with Kilt if she was okay. While Kilt was pleased that the professors gave her the chance to speak and answer for herself, she thought they held double standards when tackling racism and homophobia. The former would be addressed and corrected immediately, whereas the latter would be “tolerated” in the name of academic neutrality. Kilt thought this was a vulnerable instance and wished that professors could send her a direct message to see if she was okay, but that did not happen. Kilt shared her thoughts, “It didn’t occur to them to even try to support me, even tell that student this is homophobic, don’t do that. One of them should have sent me a direct message, hey Kilt, are you okay? I am sorry that the student said that to you. Do you want to talk after class? We’re here to debrief.”

Kilt believed that it was pivotal to teach future social workers how to see people like her and how to see themselves and their opinions. She said, “I’m in this field so that people can learn to help those kids so that people don’t have to grow up like me anymore. No one should live like I lived. No one has ever changed things for me, they don’t care about me.” She continued,

It really fucks me up to know that my professors don’t see it as a priority when they see someone else saying shit to a queer person, they don’t see those kids as [a] priority, and they don’t see me as [a] priority. When I don’t get supported by my teachers, I know they are not looking out for those kids. Because if they were, they would’ve seen that situation as something you have to step in. They would’ve thought, oh, we can’t let this student and this classroom students go on thinking that this is an okay way to see queer rights,

this is an okay way to see what Gay-Straight Alliances are like, that person was basically saying those teachers are creating gay-straight alliances so that they can sexually abuse children. They were coming just short of saying that evangelical Christian line...

Kilt expresses their deep frustration and hurt over professors' failure to intervene when queer students face harmful remarks. she felt that this lack of support signals a broader disregard for the well-being of queer students and perpetuates harmful stereotypes. They thought the other students, especially straight people, should have jumped in to help. There was another queer student in that class, Kilt wished that student had jumped in to support, but she understood that student wouldn't want herself to be a target after that homophobic comment. Kilt said,

I don't blame her for not jumping into that conversation. I believe I should fight for people even if it puts me at a personal disadvantage. I can't hate her for that. They all sat back and waited for what the professors [would] say. They are too scared to stand up for what's right.

Kilt was disappointed at people's reluctance to engage in difficult conversations and stated her personal commitment to fight for justice, even at a personal cost.

In another social work class, 4 straight students were talking about times when they were homophobic to gay people. Kilt recounted, "They think that's basically alright because they were dumb kids then, they didn't understand, and they were being homophobic because everybody was homophobic." Kilt was disheartened that these students found themselves excuses so quickly to justify their wrong behaviors. She said, "They don't care what they've done. They are not ashamed of themselves. They should be treating that with a little more gravity. It was wrong, and it hurt people deeply." She continued to comment, "I know that we must make it safe for people to discuss what they did wrong, but we also have to make it safe for me as a queer person

to listen to that.” Kilt said that the professor was very forgiving to those students and didn’t follow up. Kilt said, “They don’t think it’s important to defend any queer people that may or may not be in the audience. That professor doesn’t really remember that queer people exist in their classrooms.” Kilt thought that there were not enough open queer people to “take on all the work”. She said, “I don’t think any discrimination is going to be solved by only the discriminated against population fighting for their own rights.” Kilt believed that queer students should be asked for what they want, and they should be involved in the process.

Kilt attempted to kill herself multiple times as of the time we were having this conversation. She believed that the university could change to benefit more people than just herself. “When I first went to university, it was a promise of a safe place. It didn’t really play out that way, but it was safer...” Kilt said the university system was not set up to pull the changed name, and she tried many times to demand the University of Calgary to issue an apology for its failure to entirely implement the name change function. She reached out to the EDI office but did not receive any response. The Provost Vice-president was apologetic and sympathetic while acknowledging her experience but did not address her request. Kilt’s deadname was still listed on the Elevate Portal, and IT informed her that it was not possible to change it. “It’s an equity issue that affects students.” Apart from Elevate, Kilt mentioned that her deadname was being used for IT services, library services, and the Unicard- UCalgary Student Card. “The University’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Census from the My UCalgary Portal listed my deadname at the top...” Kilt was shocked and emailed the EDI office but did not hear back from them.

Kilt’s university experience affected her academic performance mostly negatively. She said, “It’s hard to learn when you are afraid all the time. I am leaving Social Work; I’m changing

my major because I can't fight like this anymore. I feel like there's no place for me in Social Work." Kilt did not feel supported by her faculty, as she said, "They are not interested in changing to help me or anybody like me. I feel like I am begging for my life for tiny little things. The professors don't want to support me in my learning journey." She added, "I have to cope with every horrible thing that's happened to me every time I wrote a social work assignment." Kilt chose social work because she wanted to make a change. She said,

I think I was really naive; I thought they didn't understand. Now I think they are willfully ignoring. When the wider university isn't supportive, when I don't have those queer spaces to go to, when I don't feel like the university itself is a safe place for me. I can't endure the horrible parts of social work trying to figure out how I understand myself so that I don't do the same thing to other people.

Kilt expressed disillusionment, feeling that the lack of support is intentional rather than due to ignorance. She was having difficulty navigating her identity in unsafe spaces.

Kilt dropped out of school more than once, and she had been to four different universities because she had severe problems. Kilt thought that the university was lack of safety for "people who had been through hell, and queer people that have been through hell in the city, this province." She said, "The university is not equipped to support students like me with that entrenched horror. And it should be because we don't come from families that are able to give us those skills." Kilt had been removed from mental health services multiple times because they just decided they couldn't help her. Kilt used the counseling services provided by the wellness center. She was satisfied that the counselor was queer and being supportive. She said, "It was good, but they couldn't offer me the kind of long-term trusting relationship I needed with the therapist." Kilt thought the university should proactively prepare for traumatized queer students. She said,

“[It] should make sure that [it] has the resources to support them when it’s going to affect every aspect of their education.”

While acknowledging the importance of having a physical queer space on campus, Kilt was disappointed that the Q Centre could not address the needs and concerns she shared. She elaborated,

The Q Centre told me they can’t be too politically active; the university would be weird at them. It feels like the Q Centre can’t fight, and it should be able to do that. I don’t really understand its role in the university because they are so cautious about doing these political things. I really don’t understand why the SU made a queer space and decided its purpose was not to piss off the university. It should be safe for the Q Centre to ask for what we need.

Kilt questioned the role of the Q Centre, expressing frustration that it feels constrained by the university's expectations. She believes the Q centre should be more politically active and advocate strongly for the needs of the queer community without fear of repercussions.

Kilt thought the university should listen to 2SLGBTQI+ students’ needs and respond to them. She said, “The University of Calgary says it’s a safe space for everybody; when we say no, you have things you need to do to make it a safe space.” Kilt said how the university should respond is: “I’m glad that you told me, now we’ll fix it. but instead, it seems like there is this adversarial relationship between the Q Centre, the SU, and the university.” Kilt did not understand why queer students asking for basic respect would offend the university, and she commented, “The university is just trying to get away with murder, not actually make a place a good place for queer students to be valued and celebrated”. Kilt expressed her frustration by saying, “Every single person in this institution needs to face the fact that their institution is not a

safe place for queer students. It is not celebrating us. They are losing valuable scholars, and they need to make a commitment.” Kilt was determined to do what she could so that queer students can live here comfortably and happily. Kilt criticized individuals within the university for not using their power to support queer students and commented,

As an individual, they need to say, what power do I hold, when am I going to start using it, because right now they are not. Every single person has made their choices, and their choices are queer students do not matter to them.

Kilt thought the name change had been a long-standing problem. She said, “I’ve met people who graduated from university years ago and have asked for their names to be implemented in university services.” Kilt questioned why her needs as a queer person were “an optional add-on”. Kilt was unhappy with her campus COVID record displaying her deadname. She reiterated, “I need to see queer people like me in the profession that I am in. I need to see a queer social worker outside the queer social work course.” She argued that the university should be proactively employing people “who can say that and will do that on a professional basis, not just people who are comfortable being quiet about it, not bringing up that part of themselves.” She added, “I want to see people out and proud, saying I’m here. I need profs I can talk to; I don’t talk to straight people about the problems I have.”

Kilt was calling on people to work together to solve the problem. She said, “We must really listen to and care about each other. I believe every single individual should be respected as an individual. Problems are hard to solve. I know it’s hard, but it’s got to be done.” Kilt thought the university shouldn’t assume that the best place for students who have mental health crises is psychiatric care. Kilt proposed establishing a post with emergency medical professionals—a safe space for people who have self-harm and suicidal thoughts. She thought that a peer support

person who has gone through the same experience should also be there. She said, “I think that can be a pretty good harm reduction solution for people in suicidal crisis.” Kilt believed that mental health staff are crucial for queer people because she said, “It’s so easy to feel alienated and alone in the world.” She shared that many services people take for granted are not safe for 2SLGBTQI+ people. Kilt suggested taking “a harm reduction and self-determination approach” to suicidality. Kilt thought the psychiatric system was violent and said, “Psych ward and a lot of other services are homophobic and are full of homophobic service providers.”

The University of Calgary is a haven for many 2SLGBTQI+ who found a sense of home and belonging, where they survived and thrived socially and academically. On the flip side of every coin, some other 2SLGBTQI+ students felt disconnected from the campus community, where harm and ignorance persisted. My participants told stories of their happiness and sorrow while exploring their journey at UCalgary. While their experiences and perspectives may differ, their collective voice stands for the hope that the University of Calgary will become a better place for gender and sexually diverse students, where they feel truly and fully included, respected, and accepted.

## Chapter Five—Discussion and Conclusion

The journey toward achieving genuine equity, diversity, and inclusion remains ongoing, yet it is evident that the University of Calgary has made significant strides in this direction. An obvious example of this progress is the installation of rainbow-colored stairs prominently positioned in front of the MacEwan Student Centre. This vibrant addition serves as a visible symbol of the university's commitment to fostering a more inclusive and welcoming campus environment. However, it is essential to recognize that while such initiatives are commendable, they represent only one facet of a broader effort required to address systemic inequalities and promote diversity in all its forms within the academic community. Therefore, it is imperative for the university to continue striving toward more concrete actions that uphold principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion across all aspects of campus life.

The document titled *Supporting Trans and Nonbinary People in Postsecondary Education* provides comprehensive guidance for higher education institutions to better support transgender and nonbinary individuals within their communities. Developed by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, this 2023-2024 guidance is an updated version of a 2014 document. It emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive, equitable, and affirming environments for trans and nonbinary students, staff, and faculty, particularly in the face of evolving sociopolitical challenges. The document offers specific recommendations across various areas of campus life, including admissions, residential life, campus health services, and academic affairs. It also stresses the need for ongoing self-reflection, accountability, and commitment to intersectionality in all efforts to support these communities. The guidance encourages institutions to move beyond compliance-only models, urging them to implement promising practices that address the unique needs and challenges of transgender and nonbinary



individuals in higher education. My recommendations for the University of Calgary also align with the principles outlined this guideline.

### **Campus Climate**

Although the majority of 2SLGBTQI+ students perceive the overall climate at the university as open and friendly towards gender and sexual minorities, heteronormativity still prevails on the campus. The pervasive social norm and expectation subtly influences various aspects of university life, from classroom discussions to social events. Despite the visible efforts to promote inclusivity and the presence of supportive policies, the underlying heteronormative attitudes can create an environment where 2SLGBTQI+ students may feel pressured to conform. This result echo findings from a previous study that focused on homophobic and transphobic threat at the University of the Western Cape (Matthyse, 2017), and the author suggested creating a welcoming and liberating campus for gender and sexually diverse students by raising LGBTIQ awareness. I argue that the broader university community must recognize and address these underlying biases to foster a more inclusive atmosphere. This involves not only implementing inclusive policies but also actively dismantling the norms and attitudes that contribute to heteronormativity.

The campus remains a safe place for gender and sexual minority students, yet microaggressions and subtle forms of discrimination persist within and outside of classrooms. Beagan et al. (2021) found that microgressions experienced by LGBTQ academics in Canada took heavy tolls on their wellbeing and could be difficult to combat in cisgender-normative and heteronormative institutions. Despite rare instances of blatant transphobic or homophobic abuse, it is important to acknowledge these ongoing challenges. I argue that while freedom of speech is a fundamental principle, its exercise should never come at the expense of the safety and well-

being of minoritized and marginalized groups. In rare or occasional instances where individuals propagate hate speech or exhibit discriminatory behavior, it is crucial for UCalgary to uphold campus policies that prioritize inclusivity and prohibit such harmful actions. By safeguarding the rights of all individuals to express themselves without infringing upon the dignity and rights of others, universities can cultivate environments that encourage respectful dialogue and mutual understanding (Leslie, 1986).

### **Mutual learning and understanding**

Denying the 2SLGBTQI+ existence is not a viable solution for fostering a harmonious campus community. UCalgary stakeholders must acknowledge this issue and not fall into the trap of avoiding these topics. My findings provide fresh insights into this emerging issue facing many Canadian universities where the international student population has been increasing. As UCalgary population grows to be increasingly diverse, with students from various cultural backgrounds, tensions and confrontations are inevitable. However, meaningful progress toward creating a pluralistic campus environment cannot be achieved without engaging with emotionally and politically charged issues. Quite the opposite, since 2SLGBTQI+ individuals are an inseparable part of Canadian culture, avoiding these discussions may create a rift between local Canadian students and international students. Initiating dialogue on these topics would be the right direction to raise awareness and enhance knowledge, especially for students from regions where 2SLGBTQI+ issues are taboo or being 2SLGBTQI+ is persecuted and criminalized. By confronting these issues head-on, the university can help cultivate a more inclusive and informed community that benefits all students.

## **Queer Spaces, Groups, and Resources**

The 2SLGBTQI+ groups and organizations on campus at UCalgary are highly valued by gender and sexually diverse students. They provide safe in-person spaces or virtual platforms for 2SLGBTQI+ students to relax, socialize, and connect. Currently, the Q Centre is the only physical space dedicated to 2SLGBTQI+ students on the main campus, with no such space available on the Foothills campus. There is significant potential for these groups and organizations to collaborate and advocate collectively, proactively pushing for changes that foster a more inclusive campus for everyone (Renn, 2010). I contend that volunteer and staff members in student-led clubs receive anti-racism and intercultural competence training to ensure respectful and appropriate interactions with 2SLGBTQI+ individuals from culturally, linguistically, and religiously diverse backgrounds.

Additionally, I suggest establishing a 2SLGBTQI+ space specifically for graduate students, as this group is often at different life stages and may have unique needs in terms of connection and communication (Marine, 2011). To further support 2SLGBTQI+ students, I propose designing a ‘rainbow package’ that contains all the useful and available resources. These packages could be distributed in the welcome bags given to newly admitted students at the Welcome Centre or during the orientation events at the start of the new term. These initiatives would significantly expand the support network for 2SLGBTQI+ students, ensuring that they know where to seek help and support whenever they need it.

## **Higher Education—Opportunities and Pitfalls**

People often say, ‘It gets better when you go to college,’ which serves as a ‘protection spell’ for many 2SLGBTQI+ individuals. While the saying may overlook the complexities of the issues facing gender and sexually diverse individuals, it holds some truth. Hopping onto the university

boat can often be their best chance to escape the plight associated with their 2SLGBTQI+ identities. Research shows that postsecondary institutions can indeed provide a refuge and numerous opportunities for 2SLGBTQI+ students to learn, grow, and connect with others who share similar experiences (Rankin et al., 2010). Universities offer visibility, representation, and pathways to gainful employment. For 2SLGBTQI+ students from intolerant and conservative environments, higher education holds even greater significance. Higher Education represents a ticket to freedom from oppressive circumstances. The University of Calgary can greatly increase 2SLGBTQI+ representation by hiring more faculty members or other employees who are openly queer, thereby providing role models for gender and sexually diverse students. Studies have shown that representation matters a great deal, as it provides students with mentors who understand their unique challenges and can offer support and guidance (Goldberg & Allen, 2018)

Higher education must fulfill its mission to provide a safe, inclusive, and empowering environment for all students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. It should serve as a beacon of hope and opportunity, offering support systems, resources, and advocacy for 2SLGBTQI+ individuals navigating their academic journeys. By actively promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, postsecondary institutions can not only enrich the educational experience but also contribute to societal progress by fostering acceptance, understanding, and celebration of all identities (Renn, 2010). Therefore, it is imperative that universities continue to prioritize the needs and rights of 2SLGBTQI+ students, ensuring that their university experiences are not only transformative but also affirming of their authentic selves, making the promise of ‘it gets better’ becomes a reality for all 2SLGBTQI+ students.

The 2SLGBTQI+ population often finds itself in lower socioeconomic statuses, facing financial barriers and obstacles (Statistics Canada, 2024). 2SLGBTQI+ students are more likely

to experience financial challenges that significantly hinder their educational performance and academic journey (Eisenberg et al., 2019). They may even lack sufficient economic means to support their pursuit of higher education. While the SU Pride Scholarship offers five awards of \$2000 each to undergraduate students, this amount is far from being enough. Moreover, it is concerning that there are no 2SLGBTQI+-specific scholarships available at the graduate level. To address these disparities, I propose the establishment of additional “Rainbow” scholarships open to 2SLGBTQI+ students across various specializations and faculties. Additionally, creating an emergency fund for 2SLGBTQI+ students who are displaced from their homes due to unacceptance from their families would be highly beneficial. I argue that these measures would provide much-needed financial support, helping to ensure that 2SLGBTQI+ students can succeed both academically and personally.

### **Names and Gender Pronouns Matter**

While legal name changes may be necessary for specific university services and documents, implementing an easier and seamless process for students to use or change their names is imperative to ensure that students feel their identities are respected and recognized, particularly transgender students. The inclusive function should be applied consistently throughout all UCalgary student services, including but not limited to student ID cards, transcripts, email addresses, D2L, Elevate, MyUCalgary, and other platforms displaying students’ names. Government regulations and policies should not serve as a legitimate excuse for delaying the implementation of a name-inclusive policy.

Gender pronouns are particularly important for gender and sexually diverse students, especially transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Failing to respect gender pronouns can have detrimental impacts on the mental well-being of these students (Matsuno &

Budge, 2017). By making the effort to learn and use each student's pronouns, educators signal to all students that their identities are recognized and valued (Goldberg & Allen, 2018). This practice not only benefits 2SLGBTQI+ students but also fosters a culture of compassion and respect among the entire student body. I argue that implementing pronoun usage in physical and virtual classroom introductions, on syllabi, and in email signatures are simple yet effective steps that can make a huge difference. Ultimately, this practice is a cornerstone of a broader commitment to diversity and inclusion. It ensures that educational institutions like the University of Calgary are places where all students feel safe and supported (Catalano, 2015; Nicolazzo, 2016).

### **Performative Advocacy and Allyship**

EDI has become a buzzword and a popular focus for committees within many public organizations and institutions. However, the critical question remains whether there is a genuine commitment to advancing social justice causes or if these efforts are merely for polishing the organization's image and appearing "politically correct" (Ahmed, 2012; Dobbin & Kalev, 2020). While the establishment of EDI committees and initiatives can signal a positive step in inclusivity, it is essential to scrutinize the actions and outcomes of these efforts. Are they leading to substantive changes that address systemic inequalities and foster a truly inclusive environment? Or are they simply performative gestures that fail to produce meaningful progress? Genuine commitment to EDI requires more than just beautiful rhetoric; it needs sustained and transparent actions that reflect a true dedication to social justice and equity (Rittelmeyer, 2022). I insist that the University of Calgary critically reflect on its current EDI initiatives and practices and ensure they are driving salient progress rather than merely as an image--building exercise.

## **Classroom Atmosphere**

Classroom experience is a vital part of students' campus life and achieving academic success is a primary goal for those pursuing studies in postsecondary institutions. Research has consistently shown that positive classroom experiences are essential for student success and well-being (Kuh, 2005). Non-inclusive practices such as misgendering and incorrect use of gender pronouns would cause harm and make 2SLGBTQI+ students feel excluded, adversely affecting their educational performances (Kosciw et al., 2018). While some professors strive to create a more welcoming and inviting classroom atmosphere, the use of inclusive language and other practices varies significantly across different departments and faculties. Meyer (2010) stressed the importance of consistent and inclusive language use in educational settings to foster a sense of belonging among all students. To address this inconsistency, I contend that the University of Calgary should mandate the use of inclusive language by all instructors and professors. Encouraging the use of gender pronouns in both in-person and online classes is a step toward creating a more inclusive environment (Zimman, 2017). Additionally, mandatory training and professional workshops should be provided to ensure that faculty members can confidently adopt and implement inclusive approaches and practices in their classes (Kumashiro, 2000).

While many professors take pride in their academic achievements and the depth of their scholarly contributions, some struggle to adopt inclusive language practices, particularly the use of correct gender pronouns and names. Despite progress that has been made in terms of language inclusivity, some instructors and professors are still reluctant or even refuse to embrace these changes (Nadal et al., 2016). Although, understandably, adapting to new terminology may require time and effort, the failure of some educators to prioritize inclusive practices raises questions about their commitment to fostering an equitable and respectful learning environment.

As pillars of academic excellence, professors have a responsibility not only to advance knowledge within their respective fields but also to demonstrate leadership in promoting inclusivity and diversity in all aspects of their teaching and interactions with students.

Instructors play a pivotal role in creating an inclusive and welcoming classroom atmosphere, fostering a community of care and respect is a shared responsibility among 2SLGBTQI+ students, their straight peers, teaching assistants, and professors, and other faculty members. When instances of microaggressions or other forms of harassment or discrimination occur, it is imperative that the instructors promptly address and intervene, ensuring that the problem is properly resolved (Sue, 2010). Disrespectful comments or behaviors should never be tolerated, as the absence of consequences may lead individuals to believe they can perpetrate such offenses with impunity. Furthermore, the University of Calgary should establish a dedicated pathway for LBTQ2S+ students to file complaints when they experience unfair treatment. Like the campus ombudsman, an independent committee should handle these concerns, ensuring transparency and providing effective solutions to prevent recurrence. By implementing these measures, UCalgary can better support the well-being and academic success of all its students.

Incorporating 2SLGBTQI+ content and characters into the curriculum, where relevant, is pivotal, just as it is for other important topics such as Indigeneity and feminism. Given the limited existence, reach, and influence of gender and sexuality courses, these cannot serve as the sole vehicles for educating the entire campus community on these critical issues. By purposefully integrating the 2SLGBTQI+ perspective across various subjects, the university can ensure that all students encounter diverse narratives and viewpoints. This approach allows 2SLGBTQI+ students to see themselves reflected in their studies, fostering a sense of belonging and validation (Vaccaro, 2012). Consequently, this visibility and inclusion can boost their motivation to engage



in their studies and achieve better academic performance (Garvey et al., 2017). I argue that ensuring that the curriculum is representative and inclusive is not only a matter of equity but also a vital step towards creating an educational environment where all students can thrive.

### **Washrooms for All Genders**

The University of Calgary's 2SLGBTQI+ guide lists the locations of gender-neutral washrooms available on campus. According to the guide, to date, there are 22 gender-neutral washrooms located in 11 different buildings across the main and Foothill campuses. However, the Taylor Family and Digital Library, the largest learning hub on campus where students from various departments study, has no gender-neutral washrooms. Notably, there are approximately 50 buildings on all UCalgary campuses. The fact that only one-tenth of these buildings have gender-neutral washrooms, indicates that progress is still needed at UCalgary. Recently, the newly completed Hunter Student Commons has introduced gender-neutral washrooms, serving as "an inclusive and welcoming place" for students (McGinnis, 2022). However, this new addition is not yet reflected in the 2SLGBTQI+ guide. The existence of these gender-neutral washrooms demonstrates UCalgary's commitment to inclusion. Nevertheless, it is necessary to further examine the actual user experience of gender-neutral washrooms by 2SLGBTQI+ individuals, particularly transgender, gender non-binary, or gender nonconforming students.

The presence of gender-neutral washroom sends a clear message that people, regardless of their gender identities and expressions, are welcome to use them, creating an affirming and inviting space (Beemyn, 2003). Increasing the accessibility of gender-neutral washrooms at UCalgary is imperative for fostering inclusivity and meeting the diverse needs of students, particularly for transgender or gender-nonconforming individuals. It can be a tormenting experience if a student wishes to use a gender-neutral washroom but must travel a long distance

or go to another building, especially during short class breaks or class sessions (Seelman, 2014). The university can better understand the demand and strategically allocate resources by conducting a campus-wide survey to assess students' needs and preferences regarding gender-neutral washrooms. Moreover, introducing new gender-neutral washrooms in buildings lacking them would ensure all students have access when needed. I argue that improving access to these facilities is not only a matter of convenience but also a crucial step in meeting students' basic physiological needs and fostering a supportive campus environment.

### **Healthcare Providers**

2SLGBTQI+ students had both positive and negative experiences with healthcare providers on campus. Previous research indicates that LGBTQ+ students often face barriers in accessing culturally competent healthcare services in academic settings, which can impact their overall well-being (Eliason et al., 2011). The Wellness Centre should further improve its practices to meet the diverse needs of 2SLGBTQI+ students. Ideally, the Wellness Centre could provide PrEP prescriptions and refills for gay men, as well as HRT for transgender individuals. These services are crucial in addressing the specific health needs of LGBTQ+ population, as outlined by US national health organizations (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Deutsch, 2016). Additionally, mental health counselors should equip themselves with relative skills and knowledge to better support gender and sexually diverse students. Providing training in LGBTQ+ affirmative counseling practices is pivotal for creating a supportive environment for these students (Budge et al., 2013). I argue that enhancing these services would ensure that 2SLGBTQI+ students receive comprehensive and inclusive healthcare on campus.

## **Future Direction**

The 2SLGBTQI+ community is highly diverse and non-homogenous, with members having varied needs and experiences. A nuanced understanding of 2SLGBTQI+ students' experiences through an intersectional lens is necessary, as different forms of oppression can have compounding and overlapping impacts on the experiences of marginalized groups (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Future research could focus on specific subgroups, such as international 2SLGBTQI+ students or 2SLGBTQI+ students of color, to better understand their unique challenges and support requirements. They are likely to encounter double, or triple discrimination based on their racial/ethnic identities, religious affiliations, and/or their gender and sexual identities. Compared with their cisgender peers, gender nonbinary/fluid and transgender students often face greater difficulties, thus this group deserves more targeted care and research attention.

The work of 2SLGBTQI+ groups and organizations has been greatly appreciated by gender and sexually diverse students, but it is essential to thoroughly examine their services and programs to ensure they meet all students' needs effectively. Additionally, 2SLGBTQI+ students' experiences with recreational services and centres could also be explored. The healthcare providers on campus should also be evaluated to determine if they are implementing 2SLGBTQI+- friendly strategies or initiatives. A similar study could be conducted at UCalgary's campus in Qatar where homosexuality and other 'non-traditional' gender expressions or sexual orientations are subject to persecution and discrimination, to understand the unique challenges faced by 2SLGBTQI+ students there. Furthermore, investigating the perceptions of 2SLGBTQI+ faculty members or other employees regarding the inclusivity at UCalgary would provide a

broader understanding of the campus climate, as they bring different lived experiences to the discussion.

### **Conclusion**

Creating a safer, more inclusive, and diverse teaching and learning environment extends beyond merely supporting minoritized and marginalized groups. It embodies how higher education advocates and front liners define civilization and envision a democratic society that respects fundamental human rights for future generations. Significant progress has taken place over the decades as we have witnessed the increasing visibility of gender and sexual minorities on campus today. However, much more work remains before we can achieve true and comprehensive inclusion. My sincere hope is that the University of Calgary will emerge as one of the leading universities in Canada and globally in welcoming 2SLGBTQI+ students. I firmly believe toGAYther we can build a safer, more inclusive, and more diverse campus where all students can realize their passions and dreams.

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## Appendix A

### 2SLGBTQI+ STUDENTS' LIVED EXPERIENCE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

#### Eligibility

Eligible participants for this survey are the University of Calgary students who:

- identify as something other than the gender they were assigned at birth, or
- identify as something other than heterosexual, or
- both

1) Based on this, are you an eligible participant?

I am eligible

I am not eligible (I identify as both cis-gender and heterosexual, or I am not a University of Calgary student)

#### Basic Information

2) Are you a currently a part-time or full-time student?  Part-time  Full-time

3) What is your current year of study?

Undergraduate Student  Graduate Student

First Year  Second Year  Third Year  Fourth Year  Fifth or more

4) What is your age?

18 – 20  21 – 24  25 – 29  30 – 39  40 – 49  50 – 59  60 and over

5) What is your nationality? (non-)/indigenous Canadian/ \_\_\_\_\_  International

6) What is your religious background? (Optional)

Non-religious  Buddhism  Christianity  Hinduism  Islam  Judaism  Sikhism

Other, please specify:

7) Please select the sexual orientation(s) that you identify with most.

Asexual  Bisexual  Bi-curious  Demisexual  Heterosexual/Straight

Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian  Queer  Pansexual  Polysexual

Or please write in:

8) Please select the gender identity(ies) that you identify with most.

Agender  Cisgender (you identify with the gender assigned to you at birth)

Gender-fluid  Genderqueer  Non-binary  Trans

Or please write in:

9) Are you out of closet?

Yes \_\_\_partially \_\_\_completely  No

[IF YES] 10) Whom are you out to? (Choose all that applies)

Family  Friends  Classmates  Coworkers  Faculty members

None of the above, please specify:

11) I think that the University of Calgary is LGBT+ friendly?

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

12) I feel safe, comfortable, and included on campus.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

13) I feel welcome at large university events or activities.



Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

14) I find it hard to meet and connect with like-minded students on campus.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

15) I wish there were more student areas on campus (such as student lounges or club rooms) that were permanently designated as safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

16) I would prefer to use gender neutral washrooms on campus.

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

17) I wish the university employed more full-time staff to run LGBTQ+ groups and events

Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Neutral  Agree  Strongly Agree

18) Professors say or assume things in class that make me feel excluded or uncomfortable regarding my sexual orientation or gender identity.

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Often  Always

19) Materials and curricula (outside of gender and sexuality studies courses) include LGBTQ+ people/characters.

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Often  Always

20) My professors use gender neutral and inclusive language.

Never  Rarely  Sometimes  Often  Always

21) In my experience, medical providers on campus (e.g., physicians or nurses) have been professional and respectful.

True  False  I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 22) If you wish, please elaborate:

23) In my experience, medical providers on campus have had the knowledge necessary to provide me with good care.  True  False  I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 24) If you wish, please elaborate:

25) In my experience, mental health workers on campus (i.e., counsellors, therapists) have had the knowledge necessary to provide me with good care.  True  False  I have never used these services.

[IF FALSE] 26) If you wish, please elaborate:

27) Do you know any pride centre or similar group on campus that provides services, resources, or peer support for LGBTQ+ students?

Yes  No  I don't know

[IF YES], please specify:

28) Are you involved with it as either a member/user or staff/volunteer?  Yes  No

29) What do you think are the biggest barrier, disadvantage, or issue facing LGBTQ+ university students in particular? Feel free to give examples from your own experiences.

30) What actions can university administrators or faculty take to improve the university experience for LGBTQ+ students in particular?

Are you interested in the part of this research project? (interview)

No, thanks

Yes, my email address is: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### Participant Consent Form



**Hello/Bonjour/您好!**

**WHY AM I GETTING THIS FORM?** You are being invited to be a part of a research study named *The Lived Experiences of LGBTQ2S+ Students at the University of Calgary*? This form is going to inform you about the study so you can decide if you want to participate.

**WHO IS THE RESEARCHER?** My name is Cong Luo (Hugo), a master's student at Werklund School of Education, and the only researcher in this study. I use he/his/him, they/their/them pronouns. I belong to the LGBTQ2S+ community and I am also a member of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance, a subcommittee of the Graduate Student Association of the University of Calgary.

**CAN I CONTACT CONG(HUGO) AND HIS SUPERVISOR IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH? YES, please do!**

I can be reached at 587-215-3890 or by email: [cong.luo@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cong.luo@ucalgary.ca)

My supervisor can be reached by email: [tdacalla@ucalgary.ca](mailto:tdacalla@ucalgary.ca)

**WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?** This research project aims to gain a better and deeper understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ2S+ students at the University of Calgary. This research intends to serve as a useful resource that could advocate policy-making and discussions for university stakeholders by providing insight into the perceived difficulties facing LGBTQ2S+ students.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?** Higher educational institutions play a critically significant role in achieving social justice. Although the University of Calgary is committed to creating an equal, diverse, and inclusive teaching and learning environment, it is yet to know its performance in catering to the needs of gender and sexual minority students. I contend that it is important to explore what LGBTQ2S+ students are actually thinking of their lives on campus in terms of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?** The opinions of gender and sexual minorities on campus have quite often been ignored or neglected. This is your chance to have your voices heard! Moreover, what you have to say matters and may be important in influencing changes on how the University of Calgary can improve its practices to support its LGBTQ2S+ students. Hopefully, we can make one step forward that is closer to the idealism that LGBTQ2S+ students are truly accepted, understood, supported, and most importantly, that they can be who they really are.

**WILL MY SUPERVISORS, CLASSMATES, OR FACULTY MEMBERS FIND OUT THAT I AM IN THE RESEARCH STUDY? NO!** No one will know you participated in the research study. If you choose to participate in the interviews, we will meet virtually on Zoom or Microsoft Teams or over the phone if you prefer. These options are private and secure, and your

confidentiality will be guaranteed (It is entirely your own decision whether to let them know or not).

**WILL MY IDENTITY BE EXPOSED? NO! (For interview participants only: If you want me to honour your contribution and would like to claim credibility, your real name may be used upon signed agreement).**

The online survey will provide a protected and encrypted link. Identifying and demographic information collected from it will not be traced back to any single survey respondent, and even the researcher will NOT be able to know who participated in it. Besides, I will be using composite descriptions of the information I gather so that any identifying information will not lead back to any particular student. Anyone who reads about the study will NOT be able to know your participation.

**WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO?** You can choose to fill in the survey or join the interview, or both. Let's have a conversation, I will invite you to have a one-to-one online interview with me where we talk about your lived experiences and perspectives on campus related to gender and sexual diversity topics and issues. I will be interested in hearing what you think is important to share. I may ask you specific questions to keep the conversation related to my research topic or to help you come up with specific experiences to share. The interview will take about an hour. You will be able to pick a time that works best for you.

**WHAT WILL BE COLLECTED IN THE RESEARCH?** Our interview will be audio recorded by using the recording function on Zoom or Microsoft Teams or the phone so that I can focus on listening to you and following your story when we talk and can play it back later to transcribe our conversation. The recordings will be stored in an encrypted and passcode-protected file.

**WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THE MATERIALS USED IN THE RESEARCH?** All of the original materials will be stored in an encrypted and password-protected file and will be destroyed once the project is completed. I will keep our interview data separately on a data analysis program that provides encryption and password protection. My supervisor might see the data in consultation with me in the data analysis process.

**CAN I QUIT THE STUDY?** You can quit the study (the interview part) till the end of the 2021 fall term (i.e. December 9) and you do not need to provide any reason. If you wish to withdraw from the study, please contact me at the phone number or email on the first page, and I will remove all of your information and destroy it confidentially. After all of the data has been collected and combined, I will no longer be able to remove your information.

**CAN I KNOW THE RESULTS?** I will be using the results of this study for my master's thesis. The results may also be published in academic journals and presented at conferences or may be used for professional development.

**ARE THERE RISKS TO PARTICIPATING IN THIS RESEARCH?** With any research study there is the chance that specific questions may be raised, or discomfort experienced in the process of talking about events and experiences. In case this happens during your participation, I will make the following arrangements:

1. A list of support programs and resources will be provided to you at the end of the interview.
2. You could ring or email me if any distress or concerns is resulting from your participation, and I will try my best to find a solution.

## Participant Consent Form

**The Lived Experiences of LGBTQ+ Students at the University of Calgary**

### **SIGNATURE PAGE**

#### **THE FINAL STEP:**

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, PLEASE DO NOT ANSWER THE NEXT QUESTION UNTIL YOU HAVE TALKED TO ME (CONG/HUGO) ABOUT THEM!

#### **DO YOU WANT TO JOIN THE RESEARCH DESCRIBED IN THIS FORM?**

(Answer by putting a checkmark in the box or circle your answer)

Yes – **I want to be** in the research study

No – **I do not want to be** in the research study

---

Your Name (first name only)

Signature Date

**PLEASE SEND YOUR SIGNED FORM TO MY EMAIL, I  
LOOK FORWARD TO OUR DIALOGUE!**

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

#### ***Introduction:***

Hello! My name is Luo Cong, you can also call me Hugo. I use he/him, they/them pronouns. I come from northern China. Back in my home country, I had been teaching kids English, and foreigners Mandarin Chinese as well. Before coming to Calgary for my master's program, I spent two years working holiday in Australia and tried quite a few different interesting jobs there. Since I started my journey at U of C, I have been a committee member of the Gender and Sexuality Alliance of the GSA. My previous research interest is multilingualism and multilingual education among immigrant families in Canada.

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in my research study. As you read in the informed consent, I am interested in hearing about your lived experiences at the University of Calgary. Before we get started, I want to remind you of your rights. You can decline to answer any of the questions I ask at any time. You can also ask for a break or to stop the interview at any time. Although I will respect my participant's time, if I miss any area, or you would like to share more about something important, just so you know, my time is open for you. I would be more than happy to hear more, only if you are willing to. Everything we are going to talk about today will be confidential, and your anonymity will be protected. Do you have any questions about this or the consent document you signed before we get started?

I want to create an open space for you to talk openly about your unique experiences on campus that are related to topics about gender and sexual minorities but there are some specific areas I am interested in so at times I may ask you a specific question about your experiences in class or in other university spaces related to these issues to keep our interview focused on the topic of this research.

To start off our conversation today, I wonder if you could please share with me about your campus life. What is it like for you as a student who identified as .... at the University of Calgary?

What are your perspectives on the inclusiveness on campus for gender and sexual minority students and individuals?

What experiences you have had on campus that have contributed to or shaped your attitudes and beliefs?

*At this point I will follow the participant's lead and allow them to share the experiences they deem important. I will ask for clarification and elaboration and will respond with empathic responding, paraphrasing, summarizing, and reflecting feelings during the interview. I will ensure each participant has spoken to each of the 5 core themes listed*

*below. If the participant gets off topic or the interview seems to be losing focus, I will redirect them with one or more listed questions.*

### **Theme 1: Classroom atmosphere for gender and sexual minority students**

#### ***Questions:***

1. Have you encountered any overtly homophobic or transphobic remarks in class discussions or materials? / Have you experienced any microaggression or subtle forms of discrimination?
2. Have you encountered classroom discussions that were overtly supportive and protective of respecting gender and sexually diverse students and individuals? (e.g., proper gender pronouns, and use of inclusive language by instructors and other students).
3. Have you had experiences where discussions related to LGBTQ2S+ issues were purposefully included or avoided?
4. How do your university experiences affect your academic performance/progress? (positively or negatively)?

### **Theme 2: Campus climate for gender and sexual minority**

#### ***Questions:***

1. Do you know any supportive programs or policies for gender and sexually diverse students (i.g., Gay Straight Alliances)?
2. Have you encountered any homophobic or transphobic incidents outside class? If so, how were they being addressed?
3. What are your perceptions of the attitudes of faculty staff or other non-LGBTQ2S+ students towards gender and sexual minority students outside the classroom?
4. How safe do you think the campus is for gender and sexually-diverse students? Why?

### **Theme 3: The well-being of gender and sexual minority students**

#### ***Questions:***

1. How have your campus experiences impacted you socially, emotionally, and psychologically?
2. What are your feelings and thoughts regarding gaining access to LGBTQ2S+ resources and the healthcare providers on campus?
3. How would you rate the overall quality of campus life at the University of Calgary?

### **Theme 4: What does Higher Education mean for gender and sexual minority students?**

#### ***Questions:***

1. In what ways is the university doing a good or bad job supporting gender and sexual minority students?
2. What challenges and opportunities are LGBTQ2S+ students facing at the University of Calgary?
3. What do you see as the benefits or pitfalls of higher education for LGBTQ2S+ students in general?

**Theme 5: The steps forward for the University of Calgary to become safer and inclusive for gender and sexual minority students?**

***Questions:***

1. Where changes need to be made for the campus to become safer and more inclusive?
2. How can the University of Calgary improve its practices to better support and meet the needs of LGBTQ2S+ students?

**Conclusion:**

I appreciate your taking the time to meet with me today and to share your stories. I want to check in with you on how you're feeling after talking with me about your experiences. Do you think you would like to seek any support about your experiences or any of the feelings that have come up from our interview today?

*At this point, I will debrief with the participant about their experiences narrated during the interview and any feelings that may have come up. If the participant expresses discomfort or demonstrates any signs of distress, we will discuss the counselling options available to them. I will provide each participant a list of support services that they may access if they need, accompanied by LGBTQ2S+ groups and organizations as well as other affirming spaces/centres on campus.*



## Appendix D

### Post-interview Confidentiality Form

It is my goal and responsibility to use the information that you have shared responsibly. Now that you have completed the interview, I would like to offer you the opportunity to provide me with additional feedback on how you prefer to have your data handled. Please check one of the following statements:

\_\_\_ You may share the information just as I provided it. No details need to be changed, and you may use my real name when using my data in publications or presentations.

\_\_\_ You may share the information just as I provided it; however, please do not use my real name. I realize that others might identify me based on the data, even though my name will not be used.

\_\_\_ You may share the information I provided; however, please do not use my real name and please change details that might make me identifiable to others. In particular, it is my wish that the following specific pieces of my data not be shared without first altering the data to make me unidentifiable (describe this data in the space below):

\_\_\_ You may contact me if you have any questions about sharing my data with others. The best way to reach me is (provide phone number or email):

Respondent's signature :

Date :

Investigator's signature :

Date :