

# **Fostering Safe Space: Understanding and Addressing Challenges for LGBTQIA+ Students in Goa.**

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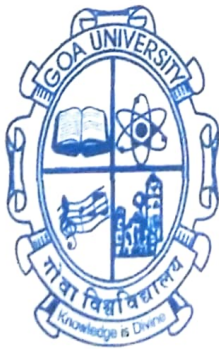
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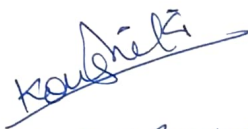
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## DECLARATION BY STUDENT

I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, "**Fostering Safe Space: Understanding and Addressing Challenges for LGBTQIA+ Students in Goa.**" is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the **Masters of Arts in Women Studies** at the **Manohar Parrikar School of Law, Governance & Public Policy** Goa University under the Supervision of Ms. Divya Parmar and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations or other findings given the dissertation. I hereby authorize the University authorities to upload this dissertation on the dissertation repository or anywhere else as the UGC regulations demand and make it available to any one as needed.

  
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## COMPLETION CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation report **“Fostering Safe Space: Understanding and Addressing Challenges for LGBTQIA+ Students in Goa”** is a bonafide work carried out by **Ms Koushiki Richhariya** under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Masters of Arts in Women Studies** at the **Manohar Parrikar School of Law, Governance & Public Policy Goa University**.

  
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## **PREFACE**

This study is motivated by the psychological challenges faced by me as a queer individual in an educational setting. As a student, there was a persistent drive to improve the system to promote greater acceptance and inclusivity, as well as to increase awareness and educate others about the LGBTQIA community. This dissertation reflects my first step for creating an inclusive environment for individuals who have similar experience as me.

The study is driven by a strong dedication to comprehending and supporting the rights and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals in higher educational institutions. Inspired by a commitment to tackle the obstacles and difficulties encountered by this community, this study set out to investigate the experiences, viewpoints, and suggestions of LGBTQIA+ individuals in educational environments. The dialogue captured in the following pages showcases a collaborative endeavor to illuminate the realities of LGBTQIA+ students, educators, and staff members, with the ultimate goal of cultivating secure, inclusive, and supportive environments for everyone.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am grateful for the time I spent doing this research, as it helped me realize that there are others who have experienced similar things as me.

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I would like to express my gratitude to all 15 participants who graciously agreed to participate in this study.

To my family, even though I was far away from all of you throughout my thesis and my entire graduate school journey, my main drive to finish this thesis was to bring you all a sense of pride.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my Father Mr. Arvind Kumar Richhariya. Coming home to you has always seemed like coming to a Safe Space. And I am eternally grateful to you for it.

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## **ABSTRACT**

The LGBTQIA+ community in India has been actively advocating for their rights and challenging societal norms, leading to significant legal advancements such as the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 and the Transgender Persons Act 2019. However, there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving full equality and acceptance for all LGBTQIA+ individuals in India. Despite these progresses, LGBTQIA+ individuals continue to face discrimination, social stigma, and homophobia. Access to healthcare, employment opportunities, and inclusive education remain significant challenges for the community.

Educational institutions, such as schools, colleges, and universities, play a crucial role in shaping attitudes and beliefs towards the LGBTQIA+ community. However, educational institutions in India lack inclusive policies and curricula that address the needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals. This research aims to gather information on the challenges and difficulties encountered by LGBTQIA+ students in Goa, define the concept of a safe space within the LGBTQIA+ community, and provide recommendations for creating an inclusive and secure environment.

The study's methodology involves coding individual interviews to identify prevailing themes and provide valuable insights for student, teachers, and higher education administrators in discerning the criteria that students seek in safe spaces and the methodologies they could employ to establish a sense of community on campuses. By understanding the prevailing themes from individual interviews, students, teachers, and educational institutional

administrators can develop effective strategies to foster a sense of community among students, promoting their overall well-being and academic succe

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, and other identities (LGBTQIA+) have gathered momentum in India, over the past decade. The LGBTQIA+ community has been actively advocating for their rights and challenging societal norms and prejudices. This growing movement has led to significant legal advancements, such as the decriminalization of homosexuality in 2018 and the Transgender Persons Act 2019, but there is still a long way to go in terms of achieving full equality and acceptance for all LGBTQIA+ individuals in India. Despite the progress made, LGBTQIA+ individuals in India continue to face discrimination, social stigma, and homophobia. The fight for equal rights also extends beyond legal recognition, as access to healthcare, employment opportunities, and inclusive education remain significant challenges for the community. Additionally, LGBTQIA+ individuals in India often face violence and harassment, with hate crimes against them being underreported and rarely prosecuted. Furthermore, societal attitudes and cultural norms continue to perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices against the community, making it difficult for LGBTQIA+ individuals to live authentically and openly without fear of backlash or ostracization. Education institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities are the secondary agents of socialization, which plays a huge role in shaping attitudes and beliefs towards the LGBTQIA+ community. However, educational institutions in India lack inclusive policies and curricula that address the needs and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals. This further hinders their ability to feel accepted and supported within these spaces, exacerbating the challenges they face in their pursuit of education and personal growth. After the decriminalization of homosexuality, some public spaces have shifted towards making spaces such as cafes, bars, and community centers that are specifically inclusive and supportive of the LGBTQIA+ community. These spaces provide a sense of

belonging and acceptance, allowing individuals to freely express their identities without fear of discrimination or prejudice. However, the accessibility of such spaces is still limited, especially in educational settings such as schools, colleges, and universities, leaving many LGBTQIA+ individuals with limited opportunities for socialization and support inside of educational institutions. This will be the center of the study. The purpose of this study is to gather information on the challenges and difficulties encountered by LGBTQIA+ students in Goa. Additionally, it aims to define the concept of a safe space within the LGBTQIA+ community and provide recommendations for creating an inclusive and secure environment. To analyze the results, the individual interviews were subjected to coding in order to identify the prevailing themes that were consistently present throughout all the interviews. This research holds significance for the domain of educational institutions and student affairs as it can aid student, teachers and higher education administrators in discerning the criteria that students seek in safe spaces and the methodologies they could employ to establish a sense of community on campuses. By understanding the prevailing themes from individual interviews, student, teachers and educational institutional administrators can gain valuable insights into students' needs and preferences regarding safe spaces. This knowledge can inform the creation of inclusive and secure environments on college campuses that may not have a designated safe space. Additionally, it can help these professionals develop effective strategies to foster a sense of community among students, promoting their overall well-being and academic success.

## **1.1 THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **1.1.1 Social Constructivism in the Context of LGBTQIA+ Community**

A theoretical paradigm known as social constructivism is based on the idea that individuals construct their identities and their understanding of the world via the interactions they have with other people and the cultural situations in which they find themselves (Vygotsky, 1978).

This viewpoint is especially pertinent when it comes to the study of LGBTQIA+ individuals because the identities and experiences of these individuals are influenced by the norms of society, the attitudes of culture, and the relationships that they have with other people. Researchers have the opportunity to get a deeper understanding of the intricacies of identity formation, socialization processes, and the influence of social institutions on individual experiences by analyzing Social Constructivism in the context of LGBTQIA+ communities.

In the context of the study of LGBTQIA+ college students who are enrolled in higher education institutions, the Social Constructivist perspective provides a prism through which to comprehend the ways in which societal attitudes and cultural norms impact the experiences of these persons. It has been demonstrated through research that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ frequently experience stigma, discrimination, and marginalization as a result of heteronormativity and cisnormativity in society (Cech & Rothwell, 2021). These repressive systems have an effect on the social interactions and institutional environments that LGBTQIA+ individuals navigate, which in turn has an effect on their sense of belonging and their well-being within educational settings.

In addition, Social Constructivism emphasizes the significance of language, discourse, and symbolic representations in the process of forming conceptions of LGBTQIA+ identities. (Kosciw et al., 2018) Research has shown that the creation of norms and stereotypes concerning sexual orientation and gender identity is influenced by the representations of sexual orientation and gender identity in the media, educational curriculum, and interpersonal contact. For instance, negative portrayals of LGBTQIA+ individuals in the media can contribute to the propagation of prejudice and discrimination, as well as perpetuate stereotypes about those individuals.

In addition, Social Constructivism emphasizes the significance of encouraging the creation of environments that are welcoming to all people, which challenge oppressive structures and



affirm the existence of a variety of identities. It has been demonstrated via research that educational interventions, such as LGBTQIA+ inclusive curricula, diversity training for faculty and staff, and student-led advocacy campaigns, have the potential to foster acceptance and support for those who identify as LGBTQIA+ within higher educational institutions (Griffin, 2017). It is possible for educators and policymakers to strive toward the goal of providing safer and more inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ students if they acknowledge the socially constructed nature of identity and the power dynamics that impact interpersonal interactions.

In conclusion, Social Constructivism offers a helpful framework for comprehending the experiences of individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ and who are individuals who are enrolled in higher educational institutions. It is possible for researchers to obtain insights into the issues that LGBTQIA+ students encounter and find strategies for building inclusive settings if they investigate the ways in which social interactions, cultural norms, and institutional structures influence the processes of identity formation and socialization

#### 1.1.2 Ecological Systems Theory in the Context of LGBTQIA+ Community.

Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, Ecological Systems Theory places an emphasis on the interconnectivity that exists between individuals and the surroundings in which they find themselves. This theory also highlights the numerous levels of influence that are responsible for shaping human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Due to the fact that it investigates the dynamic interactions that take place between persons and the many social systems in which they are enmeshed, this theoretical framework is particularly pertinent in terms of comprehending the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals who are enrolled in higher educational institutions.

LGBTQIA+ college students navigate interpersonal connections with peers, instructors, and staff within educational settings. This occurs at the microsystem level, which comprises the

immediate situations in which individuals engage with one another. According to research conducted by Cataldi et al. (2018), the quality of these encounters has a significant impact on the sense of belonging, academic success, and mental health outcomes of LGBTQIA+ students. Positive microsystem supports, such as affirming peer networks, supportive faculty members, and inclusive campus resources, have the potential to buffer the negative consequences of discrimination and build resilience among students who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Moving on to the mesosystem level, which incorporates the interconnections between several microsystems, it is possible for LGBTQIA+ college students to experience conflicts between their identities and the expectations of their families, communities of culture, and religious groups. Research conducted by Ryan et al. (2009) has demonstrated that the acceptance and support of one's family is a critical factor in the development of positive outcomes for those who identify as LGBTQIA+. On the other hand, a significant number of LGBTQIA+ students are subjected to rejection and estrangement from their families, which can increase feelings of loneliness and distress.

College students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are exposed to systemic discrimination and heteronormative practices inside higher educational institutions. This occurs at the exosystem level, which incorporates broader social structures and institutions. According to research conducted by Kosciw et al. (2021), there are significant differences between members of the LGBTQIA+ community and heterosexual cisgender students in terms of academic accomplishment, views of the campus atmosphere, and access to resources. In order to address these structural inequities, it is necessary to make systemic changes at the institutional level. These changes should include the implementation of rules that are inclusive, protections against discrimination, and affirmative practices for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

At last, LGBTQIA+ college students traverse the attitudes and views of society regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. This is accomplished at the macrosystem level, which comprises cultural norms, values, and ideologies. According to Meyer (2003), research has demonstrated that prevalent heteronormative and cisnormative ideas are a contributing factor in the stigma, prejudice, and violence that are directed toward LGBTQIA+ organizations and individuals. For the purpose of generating social change and developing environments that are more inclusive inside higher educational institutions, it is vital to challenge these cultural norms and promote LGBTQIA+ visibility, representation, and advocacy.

In conclusion, Ecological Systems Theory provides a complete framework for understanding the intricate interactions that occur between persons who identify as LGBTQIA+ and the situations in which they find themselves operating inside higher educational institutions. It is possible for academics and educators to identify ways for promoting resilience, fostering social support, and advocating for systemic change if they investigate the numerous layers of impact that affect the lives of LGBTQIA+ students.

### 1.1.3 Dynamic Nature of LGBTQIA+ Identity Development.

When we talk about the dynamic aspect of LGBTQIA+ identity formation, we are referring to the continual process by which individuals investigate, comprehend, and express their sexual orientation and gender identity throughout their whole lives. A wide range of internal and external elements, such as personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural norms, all play a role in shaping this process with their respective influences.

It has been established through research that the development of an LGBTQIA+ identity is not linear but rather fluid and multidimensional (D'Augelli, 1994). Throughout the process of navigating their identities across various social situations, individuals may go through stages

of questioning, discovery, coming out, and assimilation. Furthermore, the intersectionality of identities, which includes things like color, ethnicity, class, and ability, adds a layer of complexity to the process of developing an LGBTQIA+ identity, which in turn shapes the experiences and sense of belonging that individuals have (Ward, 2008).

Students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are engaged in the process of identity exploration and self-discovery within the context of higher education institutions, where they are confronted with a variety of unique problems and opportunities. According to research conducted by Rankin et al. (2010), college is a crucial time for many individuals and acts as a crucial era for coming out, forming community, and campaigning for social change. Nevertheless, the environment of a college can also be laden with obstacles, such as heteronormative campus cultures, discriminatory rules, and a lack of support from the school.

In order to facilitate the development of LGBTQIA+ students' identities, educators and administrators play a crucial role in the creation of inclusive campus settings, the provision of affirming resources and services, and the promotion of LGBTQIA+ visibility and representation (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011). Higher education institutions have the ability to cultivate resiliency, empowerment, and a sense of belonging among LGBTQIA+ individuals by acknowledging the fluid nature of the formation of LGBTQIA+ identities and respecting the varied experiences of their students.

#### 1.1.4 Contemporary Issues and Ecological Influences

Ecological factors at numerous levels, including interpersonal, institutional, and cultural contexts, are a significant contributor to the contemporary challenges that LGBTQIA+ individuals face within higher educational institutions. There are a wide variety of problems that fall under this category, including discrimination, harassment, assault, inequities in mental health, and a lack of access to affirming resources and assistance.

On the interpersonal level, LGBTQIA+ college students may experience bias, stigma, and microaggressions from classmates, professors, and staff members within their close social networks (Woodford et al., 2012). This can occur at the interpersonal level for a number of reasons. Individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ may have more emotions of loneliness, alienation, and psychological discomfort as a result of these unfavorable encounters, which can have an effect on their overall well-being as well as their academic success.

In higher education institutions, the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students are also influenced by institutional variables such as the climate of the campus, the policies that are in place, and the practices that are followed. It has been demonstrated through research that students who identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to encounter hostile campus settings, discriminatory regulations, and a lack of access to services that validate LGBTQIA+ identities in comparison to their peers who identify as heterosexual and cisgender (Kosciw et al., 2021). In order to overcome these structural obstacles, comprehensive solutions are required. These efforts should include the revising of policies, the provision of cultural competency training, and the construction of LGBTQIA+ resource centers.

According to Meyer (2003), prevalent heteronormative and cisnormative ideas contribute to the perpetuation of stigma, prejudice, and violence against those who identify as LGBTQIA+, both within and outside of educational settings. Within the context of higher education institutions, it is vital to challenge these cultural norms and promote LGBTQIA+ visibility, representation, and advocacy in order to create environments that are more welcoming to individuals of LGBTQIA+ identity and to drive social change.

In conclusion, the modern challenges that LGBTQIA+ individuals are confronted with within higher educational institutions are driven by a complex interaction of ecological factors that occur on various levels. It is necessary to make systemic adjustments in order to address these

difficulties. These changes include the reform of policies, the training of cultural competency, and the mobilization of community members. These changes are necessary in order to establish environments that are more affirming and inclusive for LGBTQIA+ individuals inside higher educational institutions.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This thesis aims to offer a deeper understanding of the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. The students' narratives are derived straight from their personal experiences as students in Goa.

The literature review acts as the primary portion that provides the historical context of the LGBTQIA+ community in India, highlighting the challenging journey they faced in attaining legal rights and ensuring the rights of students in educational settings. The literature review examines the concept of safe spaces and its potential implementation within the Indian diaspora.

The research design and methodology are based on the findings of the literature review. This section encompasses the methodology employed for finding participants, together with a concise portrayal of the participants' characteristics and how their interviews were carried out. Additionally, this section demonstrates the researcher's process of coding and themeing the interviews to create data points. The data points are subsequently elucidated in the results section, which directly follows the preceding part. This section mainly focuses on the underlying concepts and patterns identified in the data. The concluding section of the thesis examines the findings and their direct relevance to student affairs practice, as well as potential avenues for future research.

## 1.3 AIM

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community in educational settings and understand the specific barriers and challenges they face. Additionally, it seeks to contribute to the understanding of safe spaces by critically examining the existing literature on this topic. By achieving these objectives, this research aims to provide valuable insights for improving support systems and creating inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ individuals in educational institutions.

#### 1.4 OBJECTIVE

1. To identify barriers and challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community.
2. To define safe spaces through a literature review.
3. To propose recommendations for inclusive practices based on identified barriers and challenges.

#### 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

- What are the primary barriers and challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community?
- How can safe spaces be defined and established to support LGBTQIA+ individuals?
- What inclusive practices can be proposed based on identified barriers and challenges?

#### 1.6 SCOPE

The scope of the study extends to educational institutions, providing significant insights for student, teachers, staffs and administrators. This research aims to fill important gaps in knowledge and implementation by analyzing the characteristics that students look for to feel safe in educational settings and what methods can be used to create a sense of community in educational settings contexts.

The study seeks to reveal dominant themes pertaining to students' requirements and inclinations regarding safe spaces through personal interviews. These insights are vital for experts in student affairs and administrators of educational institutions, as they provide valuable information for creating inclusive and secure settings on college campuses, especially in cases when defined safe places are not available.

Moreover, the study aims to offer practical suggestions for these experts to create successful tactics that promote a feeling of camaraderie among pupils. These recommendation may enhance students' general well-being and academic success, fostering supportive and inclusive cultures in educational institutions.

## 1.7 OPRATIONAL DEFINATION

Terminology and language to describe experiences and identities are fluid, and identity terms mean different things to different people. This glossary of terms aims to serve as a guide and resource. Every definition does not and will not perfectly describe every individual's experience with an identity.

**Assigned sex at birth (ASAB)** the sex (male or female) assigned a child at birth, based on the child's external genitalia. Also referred to as birth sex, or natal sex.

**Biological sex** how someone identifies their sex and it is reflected on regulatory (read: oppressive) documents; a person's biological sex or sex can may be the same as ASAB or different from ASAB. Biological sex and sex can change, but ASAB is a moment in time that does not change. One can change their birth certificate, etc., but what gets changed is biological sex or sex, not ASAB.

**Cisgender** is a person whose gender identity is congruent with (or “matches”) the sex they were assigned at birth. (i.e., a person who is not transgender).



**Coming out** the process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one's own sexual orientation or gender identity (to "come out" to oneself). Also the process by which one shares one's sexual orientation or gender identity with others (to "come out" to friends, etc.).

**Gender binary** the idea that gender is strictly an either/or option of male/men/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth, rather than a continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions.

**Gender conforming** a person whose gender expression is perceived as being consistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. According to these norms, boys/men are or should be masculine, and girls/women are or should be feminine. Not all cisgender people are gender conforming and not all transgender people are gender non-conforming.

**Gender expression** a person's outward gender presentation, usually comprised of personal style, clothing, hairstyle, makeup, jewelry, vocal inflection and body language. Gender expression is typically categorized as masculine or feminine, less commonly as androgynous. Gender expression can be congruent with a person's gender identity, but it can also be incongruent if, for instance, a person does not feel safe or supported, or does not have the resources needed to engage in gender expression that authentically reflects their gender identity.

**Gender fluid** describes a person whose gender identity is not fixed. A person who is gender fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, many genders, or may feel more one gender some days, and another gender other days.

**Gender identity** a person's internal sense of being a man/male, woman/female, both, neither, or another gender.

**Gender non-binary** a continuum or spectrum of gender identities and expressions, often based on the rejection of the gender binary's assumption that gender is strictly an either/or option of male/ men/masculine or female/woman/feminine based on sex assigned at birth.

**Gender non-conforming** a person whose gender expression is perceived as being inconsistent with cultural norms expected for that gender. Specifically, boys/men are not masculine enough or are feminine, while girls/women are not feminine enough or are masculine. Not all transgender people are gender non-conforming, and not all gender non-conforming people identify as transgender. Cisgender people may also be gender non-conforming. Gender non-conformity is often inaccurately associated with sexual orientation.

**Genderqueer** a person whose gender identity is neither male nor female, is between or beyond genders, or is some combination of genders. Other terms for people whose gender identity falls outside the gender binary include gender variant, gender expansive, etc. Medical transition a long-term series of medical interventions that utilizes hormonal treatments and/or surgical interventions to change a person's body to be more congruent with their gender identity. Medical transition is the approved medical treatment for gender dysphoria.

**Questioning** a person who is exploring or questioning their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. Some may later identify as transgender or gender non-conforming, while others may not. Can also refer to someone who is questioning or exploring their sexual orientation.

**Queer** an umbrella term used by some to describe people who think of their sexual orientation or gender identity as outside of societal norms. Some people view the term queer as more fluid and inclusive than traditional categories for sexual orientation and gender identity. Not all members of the LGBTQ community embrace or use the term "queer" due to its history as a derogatory term.

**Sexual orientation** a person's feelings of attraction (emotional, psychological, physical, and/or sexual) towards other people. A person may be attracted to people of the same sex, to those of another sex, to those of all sexes, or without reference to sex or gender.

**Social transition** a transgender person's process of creating a life that is congruent with their gender identity, which often includes asking others to use a name, pronoun, or gender that is more congruent with their gender identity. It may also involve a person changing their gender expression to match their gender identity.

**Transgender** an adjective used to describe a person whose gender identity is incongruent with (or does not "match") the sex they were assigned at birth. "Transgender" serves as an umbrella term to refer to the full range and diversity of identities within transgender communities. It is currently the most widely used and recognized term to refer to people of transgender experience.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to comprehend the necessity of safe spaces in Indian educational institutions and their efficacy in supporting LGBTQIA+ students, it is imperative to examine several distinct subjects. It is crucial to first create a historical account of the LGBTQIA+ community's movement in India to get legal recognition. Second, an exploration of literature about safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ college students in various international contexts will be undertaken. Finally, Defining the safe space and its impact.

## 2.1 HISTORY OF THE LGBTQIA+ MOVEMENT IN INDIA.

The presence of numerous references to homosexuality in Hindu mythological texts, including the Manusmriti, Arthashastra, Kamasutra, Upanishads, and Puranas, confirms the existence of same-sex relationships. Relationships are not exclusive to Western culture and have been prevalent in all societies. The prevalence of a patriarchal societal structure significantly contributed to the suppression of same-sex unions. Historical literary evidence suggests that same-sex partnerships and Thirdgender have been widespread throughout the Indian subcontinent for a long time, and they were not regarded as inherently inferior until the 18th century, when British colonialism took place (Bhatia, 2016). During British rule in 1860, homosexual relations were considered unethical and criminalized under Section 377 of Chapter 16 of the Indian Penal Code. After independence in 1949, the right to equality was enforced under Article 14, but homosexuality remained a criminal offense.

In his study titled "Disciplining the 'Desire': 'Straight'," Srivastava (2014) explores two primary factors that have affected the LGBTQIA+ movement. The first is the health concerns related to HIV/AIDS, and the second factor is the controversy surrounding the film Fire, depicting homosexual affection. Health concerns led to challenge of Section 377, brought about by AIDS Bhed Bhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA), a non-governmental organization

based in Delhi. However, as a result of unforeseen events and a lack of widespread support, it was unable to achieve its intended outcome.

In 2001, Naz Foundation India Trust, addressing issues of sexual health and spreading awareness among MSM (men who have sex with men), filed a PIL suit with the Delhi High Court in its campaign to legalize homosexuality. However, the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of Section 377 of the IPC in 2013, criminalizing homosexuality.

Various organizations attempted to sensitize the general public about the LGBT in India during this period, including the first ever Indian lesbian group Sakhi, the first openly gay-community-based organization Humsafar Trust, and Humjinsi: A Resource Book on Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Rights in India. Gay pride parades in India are held annually to celebrate homosexuality and decriminalize Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. The first gay pride parade in India took place in 2003, with various cities hosting events since then. Virtual and cyber spaces have also become visible for the Indian LGBT community, providing anonymity and support for those with alternative sexualities. Equal India Alliance, Sangama, Orinam, Desi Boys, Chennai Dost, Project BOLO, Pink Pages, MINGLE, SAATHII, and Trikone are some of the virtual communities that have provided support and anonymity for the LGBT community. However, the legal framework of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code remains a significant barrier to the LGBT movement. Various organizations, such as Naz Foundation, Humsafar Trust, Voices Against 377, and SAKHI, have provided a vibrant space for the LGBT community. However, dominant right-wing scriptures decrying homosexual tendencies inhibit the flowering of LGBT activism. Since 2000, the LGBT community has successfully occupied the public sphere through gay pride marches across India, indicating that the LGBT community is gradually gaining strength and momentum. In 2009, the High Court of Delhi ruled that treating consensual homosexual sex between adults

as a crime is a breach of fundamental rights protected by the Constitution of India. In 2013, the Supreme Court reversed the Delhi High Court *Naz Foundation vs. Govt. of NCT of Delhi* case and reintroduced Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code.

The government has acknowledged the challenges encountered by the Trans Community in the *NALSA versus The Union of India* case in 2014. This lawsuit pertained to the complaints of the Transgender community. They argued that the refusal to acknowledge their gender is in violation of Article 14 and 21 of the Indian Constitution. The Supreme Court of India, in light of the grievances raised by the Trans community, rendered a decision.

The transgender community is prevalent in India, but society's perception of them is deplorable. The Supreme Court of India has also suggested the implementation of social measures and reservations for the transgender population in educational institutions and employment opportunities. The court acknowledged the legal entitlements of transgender individuals in India.

The ruling affirmed the constitutional rights of transgender individuals to autonomously determine their gender identification as either male, female, or third gender. The court instructed both the central and state governments to provide legal recognition to the transgender population and address the social discrimination they face.

In 2014, Tiruchi Siva, a member of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party [DMK], sponsored a private member bill in the Rajya Sabha that acknowledged the Rights of Transgender persons. This bill was presented after the court's decision. Although the Rajya Sabha approved this measure in April 2015, it ultimately failed to win a majority in the Lok Sabha.

In 2016, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill was introduced to the Lok Sabha by the government. The bill proposed that medical professionals would determine a person's gender identity based on medical and psychological characteristics. This proposal was met with opposition from the transgender community, who protested against the bill. The bill was subsequently referred to the standing committee, which submitted its report on the bill in July 2018.

Subsequently, a revised edition of this legislation was approved by the Lok Sabha, with 27 revisions on the 17th of December, 2018. This measure faced significant criticism for its failure to acknowledge the recommendations put out by the standing committee and the transgender community. This legislation criminalized the act of begging for transgender individuals, which was a crucial means of their survival. Additionally, there were no provisions in place to protect the rights of the transgender population in terms of education and healthcare.

The measure was reintroduced in the Lok Sabha in 2019 and was successfully passed on August 5th during the monsoon parliament session. On November 26, 2016, the Rajya Sabha approved the Transgender Person (Protection of Rights) Bill 2019 without any modifications, just through a voice vote.

In 2018, the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that Section 377 was unconstitutional, ending the war against Section 377. The Indian Supreme Court's decision in *Navtej Johar vs. Union of India* is an important step forward in giving a specific meaning and purpose to the Constitution of India, particularly for the marginalized and excluded LGBT+ community. This decision, which came after years of legal battles and centuries of discrimination, marks a definitive change in the Court's approach. The Court unanimously declared that Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which made same-sex acts between consenting adults illegal,

violates the constitutional rights protected under the Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution. Specifically, it infringes upon Article 21 right to life and personal liberty, Article 14 right to equality and equal protection of laws, Article 15 prohibition of discrimination, and Article 19 freedom of expression (Bagchi, 2018). In

## 2.2 CHALLENGES IN INCORPORATING LGBTQIA EXISTENCE IN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Many individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community have had long-standing challenges in self-understanding as a result of limited knowledge and reluctance to discuss gender fluidity and variation in sex and gender. The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) Class XII Biology textbooks include information for conditions such as Klinefelter's syndrome and Turner syndrome. However, the term "intersex" is absent. Furthermore, the school curriculum in India lacks any mention or inclusion of topics relevant to the LGBTQIA+ population. During the period of 2020–21, the online training handbook "Inclusion of Transgender Children in School Education: Concerns and Roadmap" was released by the Department of Gender Studies, NCERT. It aims to provide teachers with guidance on creating a more inclusive school environment for transgender and non-conforming gender kids. An ex-RSS member and anti-fraudulent religious conversion campaigner filed a complaint with the NCPCR, accusing the NCERT of engaging in a "criminal conspiracy" to mentally distress school kids under the guise of gender sensitization. Following that, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) sent a letter to NCERT, informing them that they had received complaints regarding the content of the instruction manual. The NCPCR also said that they had independently taken notice of the situation involving the deprivation and violation of child rights. The NCPCR expressed criticism towards some sections of the guidebook that instructed instructors to discuss the



topic of "puberty blockers" and their accessibility for teenagers. Subsequent to the huge criticism, the handbook has been withdrawn from the online portal.

The NEP 2020 categorizes transgender children as Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups 4 (SEDGs) and ensures that they get fair and high-quality education, among other provisions, to cater to the needs of these kids. This encompasses measures to facilitate the inclusion of transgender children in education and provide assistance for community-based initiatives that target specific obstacles hindering their access to and engagement in education. The ultimate goal is to eradicate any existing discrepancies in educational opportunities, including vocational education, for children of all genders and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

In the November 2023 legal case of Arya Vijay Pujari vs. State of Maharashtra, the Maharashtra State Tribunal instructed the state government to incorporate forms for the Third Gender in government and university documents. This case also highlights the necessity of a change in people's attitudes to successfully implement NEP2020. Supreme Court of India's recent "Sensitization Module for the Judiciary on LGBTQIA+ Community "

Handbook was a significant step towards LGBTQIA+ inclusivity. It highlights the need to revisit spatial development for the sensitization and inclusion of the LGBTQIA+ community to ensure a dignified life for them. This handbook provides guidelines and training for judges and judicial officers to understand the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community and ensure fair and equal treatment within the legal system. It emphasizes the importance of creating safe spaces and promoting inclusivity in all aspects of society, including spatial planning and development. By incorporating these principles into policies and practices, we can work towards a more inclusive society that respects the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

## 2.3 EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF SAFE SPACE AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

The LGBTQIA+ group still encounters obstacles, marginalization, and prejudice in many facets of their existence, including education, despite recent gains. The community's difficulties within educational institutions still need to be addressed. Article 15 of the Indian Constitution prohibits any discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. However, many educational institutions legitimize heteronormativity and CIS genderism, inhibiting attempts at emphasizing the importance of protecting sexually diverse persons alongside focusing on gender identity. The creation of safe spaces in higher education institutions provides a sense of communal belonging, safety, and visibility for these students, which could contribute to de-mystifying stereotypes (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019). Safe spaces have been a significant part of social movements like the civil rights and women's movements, serving as a space for marginalized communities to escape oppressors, trauma, and activism (Campen et al., 2022). Safe spaces in higher education refer to areas where students of marginalized identities can connect with fellow members of their identity groups (Campen et al., 2022). A safe space is a space where LGBT+ students feel comfortable and safe to express themselves in terms of their gender and sexual identity. This space is determined by individual factors such as the company, physical location, and lived experiences (Campen et al., 2022).

The notion of safe spaces in schools and universities is often discussed in international educational institutions, but it is a relatively new idea in India, particularly with relation to the LGBTQ+ population. Many individuals within the LGBTQIA+ community have had long-standing challenges in self-understanding as a result of limited knowledge and reluctance to discuss gender fluidity and variation in sex and gender.

Campus climate is a crucial construct in research on adolescents, but no known studies have evaluated whether the measured school climate constructs are equivalent across lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ), and heterosexual students, as well as sex and grade levels (Ioverno & Russell, 2021). Discrimination and victimization in schools are associated with higher rates of depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation for LGBT youth compared to their non-LGBTQ peers (Day et al., 2018). Campus settings are notorious for leaving LGBTQ youth at risk, with studies showing that they are at moderately higher risk for peer victimization compared to heterosexual youth. Peer victimization is associated with various poor outcomes, such as substance use, sexual risk, poor psychosocial adjustment, diminished academic performance, and mental health issues (Hatchel et al., 2018). (Silveira, 2022) described how he encountered criticism when he expressed his desire to investigate the potential futures depicted in Indian gay literature. However, they were able to persevere in the heteronormative educational environment by seeking concealed support from the LGBT community. "Staying away from campus gave me the freedom to express what I wanted. I was always aware that negotiating my queer politics and my gay self as a resident in the men's hostel might render me stigmatized or vulnerable. While involved with queer activism in the city, I decided to steer away from campus politics, as the campus wasn't my broader political field (Silveira, 2022). "Furthermore, "while on campus, I felt that being "out" had its privileges and pitfalls. I might have been a threat to queer students who thought they might "out" themselves if they were seen in my presence. The bittersweet irony was that I could be a voice among queer supporters while I was possibly a peril among queer folk (Silveira, 2022). LGBTQIA+ students have concerns about disclosing their sexual orientation to their classmates within an institutional environment, as they apprehend potential ostracism or lack of acceptance. The anxiety stemming from their sexuality and the resulting inability to connect with others may contribute to the development of depression. Establishing safe

spaces on campus may alleviate these fears (Mayberry et al., 2011). A positive school climate fosters development and learning, encouraging productivity and satisfaction. Sexual-minority youth experience higher rates of bullying and sexual harassment from their peers than heterosexual youth. Victimization is directly related to lower school connectedness and institutional supports, such as supportive school staff. Comprehensive bullying and harassment policies are related to higher school connectedness (Black et al., 2012).

Positive school climates are conducive to creating an ideal educational setting whereby students have a sense of safety and support. This, in turn, contributes to enhanced academic achievement, improved interpersonal connections with both peers and faculty, and an overall state of social-emotional well-being (Steck & Perry, 2017). Fostering a sense of inclusivity and safety among students, the topic that receives the greatest attention internationally is the establishment of a gay-straight alliance on campus. GSAs and LGBTQ-focused policies play mutually reinforcing roles in reducing bias-based bullying and promoting social support in schools. However, homophobic bullying is more common among transgender youth, and their peers view them as being less supportive. The relationship between GSAs, LGBTQ-focused policies, homophobic bullying, and perceptions of social support was no stronger or weaker for transgender youth compared to cisgender youth (Day et al., 2019). The presence of a gay-straight alliance in a school is strongly associated with adult support, which may reflect peer and institutional support. School climate is a key predictor of mental health outcomes in sexual and gender minority youth, with the supportiveness of school personnel and the presence of a gay-straight alliance being key indicators of a positive school climate (Colvin et al., 2019). (Tshilongo & Rothmann, 2019) highlight the need for university management to collaborate with gay and lesbian students to understand how students experience the campus climate and the steps that must be taken to address the needs, challenges, and setting up a physical safe space for LGBTQIA+ students.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter outlines the methodological approach employed in investigating the creation of safe spaces for the LGBTQIA+ community within educational institutions in Goa. This research used a qualitative approach. The study utilised individual personal interviews as the primary data collection method. A total of fifteen samples were collected. Thematic coding and narrative analysis were employed to interpret the gathered data. Moreover, the research incorporated a queer methodology framework to ensure a nuanced understanding of LGBTQIA+ experiences within educational settings. The research design aimed to capture the diverse perspectives and experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Goa's educational institutions. By utilizing a queer methodology framework, the study sought to centre the voices and narratives of marginalized communities to inform future policies and practices for creating safe spaces. LGBTQIA+ students who identify under the umbrella of LGBTQIA+ identities were asked: What are the primary barriers and challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community? How can safe spaces be defined and established to support LGBTQIA+ individuals? An open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire was formed to gain insight into the lives of LGBTQIA+ students studying in Goa. Looking through the literature available in India and other countries can also suggest that inclusive practices are based on acknowledged obstacles and challenges. Before the interview began, the researcher had obtained informed consent, and given them a briefing about the research project. After obtaining consent, the interviews were recorded and kept protected. All the names of the participants were changed to secure their identities. The researcher then transcribed the recordings and deleted the voice recordings. The researcher examined the data. The researcher then coded and identified four themes and one subtheme from the interviews. Narrative inquiry served as the method of data collection. In particular, questions from the researcher prompted respondents to share their personal narratives. These narrative interviews were focused on personal experience stories,

which Cresswell and Guetterman define as: “narrative stories of an individual's personal experience found in single or multiple episodes, private situations, or common folklore” (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 514). Participants were urged to provide comprehensive responses to the questions in order to ensure that the researcher and reader gained an adequate and complete understanding of their experiences in various environments. This also enabled the researcher to adopt the perspective of the respondent in order to empathize with and understand their authentic experience within the discussed context. This enables a study that is more influential and well-informed.

### 3.1 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND NARRATIVE INQUIRY

To comprehend the main obstacles and difficulties encountered by the LGBTQIA+ population in higher educational environments such as universities and colleges, and how students locate safe spaces inside these institutions. Finally, What inclusive strategies might be suggested in response to recognized obstacles and difficulties? The characteristics of the study issues and subjects served as the driving force behind the purposeful selection of a qualitative research strategy. Glesne (2006) states that qualitative methods are employed to comprehend social phenomena by obtaining insights from various people and evaluating how participants perceive and give significance to their surroundings. As the primary investigator, the researcher assumes the role of the major research instrument by observing, questioning, and interacting with research participants (Glense, 2006, p. 5). After gathering the data, researchers proceed to identify trends and create descriptive reports based on their findings. Utilizing qualitative research methods, the study carefully and thoroughly explained the importance of safe spaces in higher educational settings.

There are different approaches to qualitative research. Creswell (2007) suggests five basic qualitative approaches, which include narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory,

ethnographic, and case study. When doing this study, the narrative approach is chosen because it focuses on personal meanings and stories. This gives participants a chance to talk about the challenges and barriers that the LGBTQIA+ community faces. Patton (2002) explains that “the central idea of narrative analysis is that stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings”. Riessman (2008) adds that “stories reveal truths about human experience” (p. 10). To look through my participants’ windows and see their “truths,” which social constructivism would emphasize are their truths rather than universal truths, narrative methods were chosen in this qualitative study.

Narrative inquiry encompasses a wide range of methodologies used to interpret various types of texts, including oral, written, and visual forms. Narrative approaches involve a focus on the sequences of acts and occurrences, including the individuals involved, the location, and the timeframe (Riessman, 2008). Narrative analysis diverges from other qualitative analysis methods by focusing on deeper narratives as the primary unit of analysis and displaying a keen interest in narratives. The primary objective of narrative analysis is to comprehensively capture the intricacies of participants' stories, with a specific emphasis on the individual rather than the collective (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Rather than generalizing about a phenomenon, narrative inquiry revolves “around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the ones who live them” (Chase, 2005, p. 651). The Chicago School's sociological research and anthropological studies that documented personal life narratives are where narrative analysis first appeared in the early 20th century (Chase, 2005). In feminist work from the late 1960s and early 1970s, narratives were used "to bring the previously silenced stories of women from the margins to the centre and the questions and issues that arose as a result around voice, power, interpretation, and representation" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 62). Civil rights and gay and lesbian movements also used narrative techniques to collect the stories of discrimination that led to action for positive social change (Riessman,

2008). Narrative analysis centres on the human and subjective aspects of life stories and the history of organizing identity groups, which is in line with the principles of social constructivism and queer theory. In addition to narrative analysis, this study will also incorporate thematic analysis, which will provide valuable insights. The thematic analysis offers a method to develop theories by detecting recurring theme components that are shared among individuals, events, and actions in multiple situations (Riessman, 2008). It is helpful to use narrative analysis when examining the participant's narrative data in this study.

### 3.2 CODING AND THEMATISING DATA

Once these data were collected from the research participants, the researcher transcribed eleven of the interviews. Five participants did not give consent to recording the conversation. Given that their responses were noted and did not need to be transcribed, the researcher then went through the process of coding and theming the data that was most prevalent in the respondents' answers. Coding is a process that involves analyzing participants' responses and picking out recurring topics over multiple interviews. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach used to uncover, analyze, and report recurring patterns, often known as themes, within a set of data. It provides a simple yet detailed organization and description of your data set. However, often it goes beyond this and analyzes other facets of the research subject (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis allows researchers to identify underlying meanings and concepts within the data, providing valuable insights into the participants' perspectives. By examining these themes, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the overall trends and implications of their study. According to Cresswell and Guetterman (2019), themes for the research will emerge from codes that exhibit recurring themes. Themes are developed in such a way that they provide validity to the participants experiences. Additionally, themes were further subdivided into subthemes. Subthemes are



frequently observed in participants' responses and can be categorized and merged to form a broader theme (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). These subthemes offer supplementary information that can aid in comprehending the collective narratives of the participant group.

### 3.3 OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS

NAME	AGE	PRONOUNS	GENDER IDENTITY	SEXUAL IDENTITY	CLASSIFICATION
Raj	24	He/Him	Cis-Man	Gay	North Goa
Aditiya	28	He/Him	Cis- Man	Gay	North Goa
Ashi	27	She/Her	Transwomen	Asexual	North Goa
Sakshi	25	She/Her/Them	Gender Fluid	Queer	North Goa
Udita	22	She/Her	Gender Fluid	Bisexual	North Goa
Nouj	25	He/Him	Cis-Man	Gay	North Goa
Asher	23	He/Him	Cis-Man	Gay	North Goa
Aswari	28	She/Her	Cis-Women	Questionning	North Goa
Roshini	20	She/Her	Cis-Women	Lesbian	South Goa
Gem	22	He/Him	Cis-Man	Gay	South Goa
Samantha	21	She/Her	Cis-women	Bisexual	South Goa
Somam	22	They/Them	Transman	Queer	South Goa
Mindy	22	She/her	Cis-women	Lesbian	South Goa
Pranjal	20	He/Him	Cis-Man	Bisexual	South Goa

All the participants were students studying at different institutions in Goa. They were selected through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is commonly used in studies where the population of interest is small, hidden, stigmatized, or otherwise difficult to reach through traditional sampling methods (Silverman, 2016). The researcher started by identifying the first two participants who met the criteria for inclusion in the study by connecting with

organizations working for the LGBTQIA+ community. After interviewing or surveying these initial participants, the researcher asks them to refer other potential participants they know who also meet the study criteria. The process continues iteratively, with each new participant referring to more individuals who fit the study criteria.

Additionally, the researcher disseminated the information in WhatsApp groups to attract more participants. Every individual listed above comes from various backgrounds and educational environments, contributing to their distinct experiences. This snowball sampling technique allowed for a diverse range of perspectives to be included in the study, enhancing the richness and depth of the data collected. By leveraging social media platforms like WhatsApp, the researcher reached a wider audience and could potentially uncover unique insights from individuals who may not have been initially accessible through traditional recruitment methods.

### 3.4 LIMITATION

This study had several drawbacks. One major challenge is the near-impossibility of comprehensively encompassing the entire range of LGBTQIA+ identities in the study. The LGBTQIA+ group encompasses a multitude of identities. Conducting a comprehensive study that encompasses all of these identities would be exceedingly difficult. This research study provides a foundation for future investigations into distinct identities within the LGBTQIA+ community, while also offering a valuable understanding of the LGBT+ population in Goa. Several interviews were done during the initial meeting, but the researcher struggled to establish a strong rapport with the participants. Four out of fifteen participants declined to provide interviews on record, perhaps resulting in the omission of valuable insights in their written answers.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULT AND ANALYSIS**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community in educational settings and understand the specific barriers and challenges they face. Additionally, it seeks to contribute to the understanding of safe spaces by critically examining the existing literature on this topic. By achieving these objectives, this research aims to provide valuable insights for improving support systems and creating inclusive environments for LGBTQIA+ individuals in educational institutions. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1 What are the primary barriers and challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community?

RQ2 How can safe spaces be defined and established to support LGBTQIA+ individuals?

RQ3: What inclusive practices can be proposed based on identified barriers and challenges?

In this chapter, the researcher will be presenting diverse perspectives on the barriers and challenges faced by the community in educational institutions. Subsequently, a comprehensive account is provided of the emergent themes that directly address the research questions posed in this study. The themes are categorized concerning the particular research question that they support. First, themes that illustrate What are the primary barriers and challenges faced by the LGBTQIA+ community? (a) fear of being out and experience of being out in the institution; (b) bullying and discrimination faced by the participants; (c) negative reactions of others (peers or students). Second, How can safe spaces be defined and established to support LGBTQIA+ individuals? (a) What is a safe space? (b) creating spaces; (c) existing support systems. Third, What inclusive practices can be proposed based on identified barriers and challenges? (a) Initiatives and Changes. Participant narratives are provided to describe and support each theme.

#### 4.1 FEAR OF BEING OUT AND EXPERIENCE OF BEING OUT IN THE INSTITUTION

The first objective of this study is to identify the challenges and barriers faced by the LGBTQIA+ community. Participants throughout the interviews mentioned a fear of disclosing their identity to the teachers and fellow students out of concern for potential harassment or discrimination. Past unpleasant experiences or tales heard from others in the neighborhood frequently served as fuel for this fear. There are differences in each participant's experiences and reasons for feeling this way. Mostly are comfortable in who they are and do not affect their mental peace by others' reaction but some took time to come to the terms and express who they are and be comfortable in educational institution.

Soman, A trans man said "As a man who likes men, I have felt the fear and uncertainty that can come with being open about my identity in certain environments. I feel anxious about how I will be perceived and whether I will be fully accepted for who I am. At the same time, I have also come to realize that my self-esteem and confidence in my identity are essential in navigating these situations. Embracing who I am and being proud of my identity has given me the strength to face any judgment or negativity that may come my way. I have learned that my worth is not defined by others' opinions, and being true to myself is the most empowering choice I can make.

Sakshi, a gender-fluid queer person, mentioned, " When I came to know about my sexuality and my inclinations, I was comfortable with them. I was not scared at all. What if somebody knows or not? I was okay with it, and if anybody knows, that has not changed since I came to Goa. A lot of people in my department know, and a lot of people in the hostel know, and it's not like I'm telling them on purpose or something that comes up in the conversation. I don't deny it because, to me, sexuality is a private matter, but it is also nothing that needs to be hidden. So it is normal for me. Until now, there have been some people who might be judgmental, but some of my colleagues have advised me not to talk too much to them

because it is beyond their understanding. So I have not actually gotten any chance to interact with them in these regards. So, I don't know their reactions to people, but from my understanding, they won't be so welcoming. Also, if they are not very harsh or extreme, they won't be very welcome. I refrain from expressing who I am , so why create unnecessary complications because they are not important to me or anything? So, yeah, if someday we are in any conversation or anything and this topic comes up, I am not going to hide who I am.

This clearly shows that she is comfortable with who she is, but a fear of negative reactions still crosses her mind.

Nauj, a gay man, "To know people's mentality towards gay people, I started by saying that I am bisexual. After that, they supported me, and then only I came out as a gay man." This clearly reflects the fear of being fully out, as well as using bisexuality as a backup because people think that being bisexual is not as bad as being gay. This highlights the stigma and discrimination that still exist against those who identify as gay.

Gem, a gay man, said, "You know, it's not like I go around saying, I am bi, I am bi, or something like that, talking about dating, or, you know, like, I would not like how boys talk about dating girls. They are very open about it, and they are very proud of dating girls. So that's kind of how I also take the conversation when I'm talking about boys. Not like I hush it and keep it quiet. I don't think you would have received a similar answer. See, people would be a little bit more hush trying to keep it a secret. I've never had a reason to keep it a secret so far.

Aditiya, a gay man, said, "Always fear being out. Even I was very scared to be out in Goa. It wasn't an easy journey, but I took a step-by-step approach. But in the previous institute, like, I don't want to name it. When I was studying in X intitute (changed name), people were very homophobic. I was closet; I didn't even tell anyone. But still, they would pass comments, say

something, and laugh. And I remember that I used to cry at times. Not directly, but I'm very sure people have told me that I was called many names behind my back. I was quite a popular kid. I was also called many names, like Chakra, Hijra, and whatever. So. But behind my back, I was always the subject of gossip and ridicule."

Asher, a gay man, said, "Um, there is a fear. There used to be more in my first year when I came out. So the first year was quite scary because I told a few people. Then they told other people. Every friend has a best friend. So things just drive very fast. Things got paranoid in the middle. And then, towards the end of the year, I met a friend who doesn't care if I am gay. She did not give a shit about anybody or how anyone else thinks. And from then on, I realized you cannot control what others are thinking; you can only control how you react to things. So I just decided, like, I'm not going to care."

Ashi, a trans woman, said, "So I actually came out after joining the PhD program here. So in that case, I would say that, like, being here kind of helped me with the whole coming out process and departments, like, in this institution specifically. Initially, I was a bit hesitant, and, like, I was fearing people's judgment because, when I came., I was not out as a trans person. And then I transitioned later. So, obviously, for people here, it would be, like, a big shock. They were also kind of transitioning with me. So that's how I see it. And my department was specifically very open to my identity. So initially, it was a bit difficult. People were hesitant to talk about it. But then, like, I had to initiate some conversations. But once I did that, things were, like, very conversational in the sense. People were willing to listen to me and take into account what I needed. They are not holding on to any, you know, ideas of how I should be or anything. So I was allowed to be. However, I am. So that kind of helped me a lot. So even though the fear of judgment was there, I kind of, like, flew into it."

And so I would say that my department has made it easier for me because most of the people here have been approaching me with an open mindset."

Samantha, a bisexual woman, said, "This institute has such a good name. It is a well-established institution known for being open-minded and diverse in all aspects. You can definitely see the diverse culture and people with an open mind at the college. I've never had that feeling here. Everyone is very accepting, and there is no judgment except for one or two people. So there is no fear of coming out.

Aswari, a questioning woman, said, " I am not at all out in my institution because I am scared of how some people might react. That fear is there; I am trying to navigate on my own; I think I need time."

Pranav, a bisexual man, said, " I don't (fear)." There hasn't actually been much change in that. I've just identified as that for quite some time now. And I'm also pretty much out of the closet. I mean, people know I have things for boys too. So, like, I haven't. I haven't denied it, per se. It's not. It's just something people know. And while I would say a majority of this college is on the homophobic side of things."

Udita, a gender fluid bisexual woman, "No, (I don't fear being out). So my classmates are very open people. My teachers are also very open. This is nothing for me to fear in the institution, or at least in my department.

Roshini, a lesbian woman, said, "Since I came here, I am slowly coming out to the people who are close to me. Not all my experiences were positive or negative, per say, they were neutral and curious, but I haven't mentioned it to my professor. I don't know how they will react."

## 4.2 BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATION FACED BY THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants in the interviews reported encountering societal stigma, discrimination, and bullying due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Frequent occurrences of name-calling, offensive comments, and categorizing people based on stereotypes are documented, leading to a sense of being excluded and marginalized in educational environments. Several people had positive experiences, while others had negative ones. The latter group included:

### 4.2.1 EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION

Nouj describes " The first day I got to know that these people are not into this kind of stuff. And the people over here who are literally getting offended by the dress I'm wearing. I used to wear a crop top in the first day with baggy boots and jeans. And the first comment I got to know that are you a guy? Why you're dressing like a girl? I was like, dude, this is my dress. And I'm proudly saying I'm okay to wear this. That's the first comment that I got there. The moment I got that comment, I was like, nouj you made a regrettable decision you going to regret it then. One of faculty did a comment like this. He told me that, baba, this is not the place for you. Just go to NIFT, somewhere where you can show off your dress and things. You are doing physics here. Physics has manners. Manner means how should I dress. He was like "wear a nice shirt and pant. "i replied" Sir,dis is a shirt and pant what should I wear ? He continued "This is not the proper way . physics has a manner. Like if you are studying a course,do you really think that the course should have manners? Like dress up like dis only, no right? Even in my class people are coming with crop tops, girls are coming with shorts, long knee shorts—everyone is coming. And why can't I can go with a short? It's more than that. It's equality? They can wear anything they want. We have to, you know, I really want to express myself while my dressing. I'm really into dressing. I'm really into fashion. So I'm showing it. Only girls can show fashion, or none of the straight men can't ?"



Soman a trans man mentioned "Yes, I faced discrimination in institute due to my gender identity. It was a difficult time for me as hurtful comments were thrown my way, causing me to feel scared and isolated. People have perception how a man should be and how a woman should be. If be dont fit in a box we are looked differently. Everyone advised me to have long hair and dress in a certain way, but this is who I am; I don't fit in their boxes.

Similarly, Pranav mentions that "people find it unusual if I paint my nails; they say, "Why are you doing that?" He further explained "I would say it's more like, bewilderment of people, because many of these people just haven't seen someone do that. Like, it was just, like, out of the scope of reality that, more than trying to berate me, they're just confused about it."

Everyone did not experience discrimination in the educational institutional system. These experiences demonstrate that individuals who do not conform to societal expectations or norms become targets of prejudice.

Individuals who claim to have not encountered any discrimination have not fully disclosed their true identity and have instead sought refuge in a secure environment where they may freely express themselves.

Mindy, a lesbian student, said, "To be honest, I haven't personally experienced any direct bullying or discrimination. I've always been pretty good at flying under the radar, keeping my head down, and blending in. I know how hurtful and damaging those "that's so gay" comments and jokes can be, even though they're often brushed off as harmless. But I guess I've been lucky so far, or maybe I'm just really good at hiding who I truly am." Similarly, Roshini mentioned that I only come out to people who appear to be safe and not harming. "In one accident, my childhood friend said that its nice that you are pansexual because you have backup and can be with a boy. That comment made me regret my decision."

#### 4.2.2 EXPERIENCE OF BULLYING

Just three of the participants had experienced bullying, and the others had a persistent fear that they weren't safe in the institution.

Aditiya mentioned that "he was taken to another boy's room. Three boys wrapped a towel around his head and shook his head before his roommate came to save him.

Similarly, Gem narrates, "So I am slightly feminine, not like I'm going to go out with a full face of makeup. Like you know, I am Little bit flowy ,dance around, you know, like gay as much, that's how I'll like to say it. Some boys in college started making fun of me by making me dance for them and sing for them. As a part of ragging or something specifically, it was targeted at me. And that kind of ended up in a fist fight.

Raj, a closeted person, said, "There was this one time, though, when, a group of guys cornered me after class and started mimicking the way I walked and talked, laughing hysterically. I felt completely humiliated and trapped. I just stood there, frozen, wishing I could disappear. Eventually, they got bored and left, but the feeling of helplessness stayed with me.

Nouj expressed that he has a constant fear that he might become targeted. He said, "So the moment I told a girl she is from my department, she's in my class, I told her that I'm gay. And she got to know that I put nail paint on, and she asked me why you were putting nail paint on. I said I'm gay. I'm just casually saying I'm gay. She said , Don't tell those kinds of things here. People will get offended. Maybe you will get beaten by people. What, that one thing made me fear, like, am I safe here? The question is triggering me, triggering me all day. She passed this thing in every class. And the moment I got to know that everyone knew that I'm gay because of her, So this is the is the first time I have come to know that. You know, these people are like a gap or a wall between me and them.

#### 4.3 WHAT IS SAFE SPACE?

During the interviews, every participant provided their interpretations of safe spaces. Several of these definitions incorporated the words comfortable, friendly, non-judgmental, acceptance, respect, and open. Safe spaces were defined as physical, virtual, and psychological environments where individuals felt supported and empowered to express their true selves. The definitions offer a nuanced insight into how the participants viewed and comprehended safe places.

Many of the participants spoke about safe spaces in terms of places where they and others could be themselves without fear of being judged. "Safe spaces" are places, either physical or mental, where people can go and be themselves without worrying about being judged, according to Roshini." Aditiya, a fellow student who identified as a gay guy, also mentioned that he felt comfortable being who he is in safe places. A "The load is off your shoulders, like you don't have to put up this charade, of acting a certain way, like, you're completely free to be yourself, no one's going to judge you for being gay ," he said, indicating that he understood he was in a safe place." " Nouj also believed that he could be himself in safe places, which he characterized as "any location or venue where any individual, for any number of reasons or identities, can go and be themselves without fear." Similarly, Udit defined safe spaces as places where "you can be yourself and just be." A place where I can say what I would like to say, when I want to say it, and how I want to say it," Asher said of Safe Space. The participants' description of safe spaces revealed their perception of these environments as havens where they could freely express their authentic selves, devoid of concerns about societal scrutiny or the need to conform to heteronormative norms.

Several participants mentioned feeling at ease when expressing themselves in non-judgmental environments. Pranjali, who identifies as gay, values having a space where they can simply be

themselves without worrying about the opinions of others. Sakshi, who identifies as lesbian/queer, described a place where people can feel comfortable and secure. "You feel at ease being your true self, expressing yourself freely without any need for self-censorship. It's a welcoming environment where you feel fully accepted." Samantha, a woman who identifies as bisexual, found that safe spaces allowed her to feel at ease and freely express herself, especially when it came to her sexuality. Ashi, a transwoman, defined safe spaces as a welcoming environment where individuals can freely express themselves without fear of judgment. She elaborated, "It's a comforting feeling to know that there are individuals who will accept you without judgment. It allows you to let your guard down and relax." As mentioned in the quotes, participants found that being able to feel comfortable with their identities in safe spaces created an atmosphere of acceptance, relaxation, and respect.

Gem and Ashwari, along with other participants, discussed the importance of learning and speech boundaries within safe spaces. Gem emphasized the importance of creating a safe space that promotes learning and respects the privacy of individuals. Ashwari had a unique perspective on safe spaces, drawing a comparison between these spaces and free speech zones. She emphasized the importance of safe where free speech can be expressed without facing any negative consequences. She added, "I don't expect there to be no judgment, as that would be unrealistic. However, it's important to create an environment where you feel comfortable expressing what you truly need, not just what you desire." Ashwari values a space that is comfortable and offers a strong support system. She said, "It's important to have a support system, whether it's online or in a place where you feel at ease and don't have to justify yourself." Feeling at ease and having the assurance of confidentiality were crucial aspects of creating a safe environment for these individuals.

#### 4.4 CREATING SPACE

A number of the participants provided their own definitions of a safe area. Simultaneously, they endeavor to establish a secure environment for themselves within the institution, be it in terms of mental or physical well-being. Mindy, a closeted lesbian, is well described. "My room, definitely. It's my own little safe haven where I can be myself, especially with my roommate, who knows about me and is super supportive. Sometimes, hanging out with a small group of friends at the hostel feels okay too—the ones who know I'm lesbian and don't make a big deal out of it. We can just be ourselves and relax without worrying about hiding anything. Other than that, I mostly stick to neutral spaces like the library, where I can just blend in and focus on my studies. Similarly, other participants mentioned repeatedly that coming out to a few people has given them a sense of security. Nouj, a gay man, says that "since I came out, I just try to educate people, because it is new for them also. Not everyone is violent; some just need to learn, so try to explain it to people and tell them that my sexuality is just one part of my life. I am a human, just like them. A noteworthy narrative that arises while considering the creation of a safe space is the progressiveness of Goa. While there are already LGBTQIA+-friendly venues, ensuring that an educational institution is inclusive of all requires educating individuals and establishing positive examples. Like Aditiya said, "I saw Professor Andy walking with his partner so comfortably in campus that it gave me a feeling that I could be free too. It was so good to see a person so comfortable in themselves, and it was because of him that it was so normalized on our campus."

Some other participants have also brought up the idea that safety begins from within, as it is a feeling that originates from self-acceptance. When this feeling arises, it's as if we become indifferent to the opinions of others.

#### 4.5 EXISTING SUPPORT SYSTEM

No participant recognized the existence of any support system within the institution of Goa. Assistance among the community outside the institution was discovered, and the importance of having a support system within the institution was recognized. "I talked to a lot of people online who were struggling with the same thing, (sexual identity) and in a way I was trying to help them so and they were trying to help me. So I know it was like why are we helping each other? While we should be also helping ourselves" Udit talks about her experience while searching for the support system.

Sakshi mentioned, "There was this Instagram handle that used to organize gatherings in Goa since the time I came here; it has been inactive, and I have not felt any offline presence from them, so I cannot say that there is any. But again, I am not aware that there may be something, but that is very hidden because of the number of people I know in Goa who are queer by those WhatsApp groups. Only I have talked to them, and they are also unaware of any offline places where they can feel safer and more secure. So, there is a very, very lack of offline and on ground queer support in Goa. So there are mostly a lot of places where you can go and open the party and do everything quickly you want to do. And those pubs are those restaurants and cafes they support, but to say that is a specific group, a designated place, or an NGO, I'm not aware of any organization here. Most queer people found refuge in the online support system. Ashi explains how she found support online. " I used to get online therapy. Yeah. So something that has really helped me during my transition is that, first, I did not have many people to talk to because, when I was transitioning, I did. I do not have many, like trans friends or peer friends. So there is this free online support. Group called Mitra Trust, and they offer. Like four or five different sessions. And one of those is called queering the matrix, which is, like, for people. Who is questioning their identity, and you? Know who just wants to; there is no restriction per se. You can just be there and not say anything; it's fine. It's completely free. So. So it's run by a psychologist. And, like, they are, like, very

accommodating. They are also creative people, and so they are very accommodating of the identities of people generally. So their sessions have, like, really helped. Me because, like, most of the time. I used to be, like, very lost, and I will just sign up. The sessions and just sit there, like, for a whole five to six months. I was just, like, going through there. Sessions and, like, talking to them, and some of them are, like, very good friends till now, like, so. So I didn't take support from any other online group, so, because, like, I. I was taking this help, and it was helping me a lot. So Mitra does. And apart from that, like,. Not very much, but sometimes I used. To talk to my psychiatrist also, like, but not very deep conversations or anything. Just like a very shallow conversation. It helped me very much. But sometimes it is just to make her say what I want to hear. Roshini, Gem, Pranav, and Samantha founded a group named "Rainbow Group" that includes everyone. This is a student-led program that does not involve any faculty members. Students gather at a designated location once a month for informal discussions. Every member of this group is invited, with the primary purpose being to provide a platform for them to freely articulate their emotions. Nouj, a gay man, shares his concern: "I have a limited network within the community here. I would love to arrange an event here, such as a pride walk or street play, to demonstrate our presence. However, it is currently proving to be quite challenging due to the absence of a support system. I am uncertain about the number of individuals who will step up to assist an LGBTQIA+ cause.

These thoughts indicate that in the absence of offered spaces, students would actively seek or create a space where they can escape the heteronormative system and establish connections with one another.

## CHAPTER5: CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study's findings enhance comprehension of the barriers and obstacles encountered by LGBTQIA+ individuals in higher educational institutions in Goa, as well as the definition of a safe place.

- What are the key challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ students in Goa's educational institutions?
- How can safe spaces be defined and established to support LGBTQIA+ individuals?
- What strategies can be implemented to address the identified challenges and foster inclusivity ?

In order to address these inquiries, a series of comprehensive, one-on-one interviews were carried out. Thematic narrative analysis was employed to analyze and interpret the data, providing insights to address the study issue. This chapter presents conclusions derived from the examination of how the findings of this study are connected to the research topics and enhance the existing body of literature. This chapter also provides guidance on creating a more secure environment for the LGBTQIA+ community inside an institution.

## 5.1 CONCLUSION

Derived from the existing literature and the findings of this study, three overarching conclusions are presented and analyzed in relation to the experiences of college students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, and others in higher educational institutions such as universities and colleges.

Firstly, LGBTQIA+ students encounter harassment and prejudice within higher educational institutions. The narratives shared by participants highlight instances such as derogatory name-calling, physical bullying, and discriminatory actions based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These experiences not only contribute to feelings of marginalization and



exclusion but also hinder academic and personal development. It is evident that despite efforts to promote diversity and inclusion, LGBTQIA+ students continue to face significant challenges within educational settings.

Secondly, individual pupils have varying interpretations and understandings of safe spaces. While some participants expressed the need for physical spaces where they feel accepted and supported, others emphasized the importance of creating inclusive environments beyond designated areas. Safe spaces, as perceived by LGBTQIA+ students, encompass not only physical locations but also interpersonal relationships, institutional policies, and cultural norms. Recognizing the diverse needs and perspectives of LGBTQIA+ individuals is essential in fostering truly inclusive educational environments.

Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure that higher educational institutions embrace and accommodate those with LGBTQIA+ identities. The findings underscore the importance of implementing inclusive non-discrimination policies, providing comprehensive education and awareness initiatives, and offering tailored supportive services and resources, such as counseling and LGBTQ+ student, to meet the diverse needs of LGBTQIA+ students. By prioritizing comprehensive faculty and staff training, engaging in advocacy efforts to promote LGBTQIA+ rights, and establishing allyship programs, institutions can create a more affirming environment where all students feel valued, respected, and supported.

#### 5.1.1 Harassment and Prejudice:

One of the primary conclusions drawn from our study is the prevalence of harassment and prejudice encountered by LGBTQIA+ students in higher educational institutions. Existing literature has long documented the pervasive nature of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in academic settings (Duncan & Roffman, 2019). Our findings corroborate these findings, revealing instances of name-calling, bullying, and discrimination

experienced by LGBTQIA+ students in GOA colleges and universities. These experiences not only have detrimental effects on the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals but also hinder their academic success and personal development (Taylor et al., 2011).

#### 5.1.2 Interpretations of Safe Spaces:

Furthermore, our study highlights the diverse interpretations and understandings of safe spaces among LGBTQIA+ college students. While some participants expressed the need for physical spaces where they feel accepted and supported, others emphasized the importance of creating inclusive environments beyond designated areas. This nuanced understanding of safe spaces aligns with previous research, which suggests that the concept extends beyond physical locations to encompass interpersonal relationships, institutional policies, and cultural norms (Morrow, 2015). By recognizing the multifaceted nature of safe spaces, educational institutions can better meet the diverse needs of LGBTQIA+ students and foster a more inclusive campus environment.

#### 5.1.3 Inclusive Practices

Finally, our study underscores the imperative need for higher educational institutions to embrace and accommodate those with LGBTQIA+ identities. Implementing inclusive policies, providing education and awareness initiatives, and offering supportive services and resources tailored to the needs of LGBTQIA+ students are essential steps towards creating affirming environments. Faculty and staff training, advocacy efforts, and allyship programs play a crucial role in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within educational settings (Griffin & Figg, 2020). By prioritizing these initiatives, institutions can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive learning environment for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## 5.2 DISCUSSION

### 5.2.1 Connection to Social Constructivism

According to Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, individuals construct their identities and their understandings of the world through the cultural contexts and social interactions in which they find themselves (Vygotsky, 1978). The findings of our research are consistent with this idea, as LGBTQIA+ students navigate their identities within the context of the socio-cultural environment encountered in higher education institutions. The qualitative data indicates the influence that societal expectations, stereotypical beliefs, and stigmatizing behaviors have on individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+, such as expectations of heteronormativity and harmful stereotypes. This highlights the necessity of inclusive practices and supportive environments in order to challenge oppressive structures and create affirmation and acceptance. Furthermore, our study emphasizes the importance of creating safe spaces for LGBTQIA+ students to freely express their identities without fear of discrimination. By fostering a sense of belonging and understanding, higher education institutions can promote a more inclusive and equitable environment for all students.

### 5.2.2 Connection to Ecological Systems Theory

Developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979, the Ecological Systems Theory places an emphasis on the interconnection that exists between humans and their environments. This interconnectedness may be found at all levels, from microsystems (such as interpersonal connections) to macrosystems (such as social standards). Our findings highlight the important role that a variety of environmental factors play in the experiences of LGBTQIA+ college students. These elements include the support of their families, the relationships they have with their peers, the policies of their institutions, and the attitudes of society. These intersecting systems influence the opportunities and difficulties that LGBTQIA+ people face

in educational settings, underscoring the importance of implementing holistic support strategies, such as counseling services, inclusive curricula, and community engagement, to improve their well-being and academic performance.

### 5.2.3 Dynamic Nature of LGBTQIA+ Identity Development

D'Augelli et al. (2017) came up with the paradigm known as the Dynamic Nature of LGBTQIA+ Identity Development. According to the findings of our research, LGBTQIA+ students go through a variety of experiences as they manage their identities within the framework of educational settings. The participants shared personal experiences of the challenges of coming out to family and peers, navigating societal expectations, and negotiating their identities in the face of discrimination and prejudice. These findings highlight the necessity for educational institutions to acknowledge the fluidity and complexity of LGBTQIA+ identities and to provide accepting environments for students in which they can explore and express their real selves.

### 5.2.4 Contemporary Issues and Ecological Influences

There are still contemporary challenges that continue to have an impact on the lives of LGBTQIA+ college students in Goa, including discrimination, harassment, and a lack of representation. The qualitative data reveals instances of bullying, name-calling, and microaggressions that LGBTQIA+ individuals have experienced in educational settings. This emphasizes the urgent need for policy reforms, increased institutional support, and the implementation of anti-discrimination measures within educational systems to create a safer and more inclusive environment for LGBTQIA+ students. In addition, the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ students are shaped by ecological influences, which include institutional regulations, cultural norms, and community support. These factors, including inclusive curricula, faculty support, LGBTQ+ student organizations, and community acceptance, play a

vital role in shaping students' sense of belonging and overall well-being within higher educational institutions.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATION

Prior to discussing recommendations, it is crucial to recognize the complex nature of the issues experienced by LGBTQIA+ individuals in higher education institutions. An intricate interaction of interpersonal, institutional, and cultural factors affects the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. The obstacles that significantly impede the academic achievement, mental well-being, and overall welfare of LGBTQIA+ students encompass discrimination, harassment, assault, and the limited availability of supportive resources.

Additionally, individual experiences, social interactions, and cultural norms all play a role in the fluid and ongoing process of creating LGBTQIA+ identification. The presence of overlapping identities like race, ethnicity, class, and ability, which affect people's experiences and feelings of inclusion inside educational environments, increases the complexity of this process.

Given these difficulties, it is of utmost importance to cultivate secure and all-encompassing environments for LGBTQIA+ individuals at higher education institutions. Establishing inclusive environments necessitates a thorough strategy that tackles institutional obstacles, fosters understanding of many cultures, and enhances the presence and portrayal of LGBTQIA+ individuals in campus communities.

The following ideas provide practical strategies and exemplary approaches for higher educational institutions to foster secure and all-encompassing environments for LGBTQIA+ students, professors, and staff. These ideas are based on social constructivist viewpoints, ecological systems theory, and recent research on LGBTQIA+ identity development and

ecological impacts. By implementing these suggestions, institutions can make substantial progress in fostering fair, supportive, and validating environments for LGBTQIA+ individuals in higher education.

### 5.3.1 Infrastructure Development

The Protection of Transgender Persons Act 2019, infrastructure development within higher educational institutions takes on added significance as it directly intersects with the fundamental rights and protections provided to transgender individuals. The Act, which aims to uphold the rights of transgender persons and ensure their full participation and inclusion in society, underscores the need for gender-affirming environments that respect and accommodate diverse gender identities.

Under the Act, transgender individuals are entitled to access public spaces, including educational institutions, without discrimination or harassment based on their gender identity. However, the lack of gender-neutral facilities within educational institutions can pose significant challenges for transgender students, as they may face discomfort, discrimination, or even violence when using gender-segregated spaces that do not align with their gender identity.

To address this issue, infrastructure development initiatives within higher educational institutions must prioritize the establishment of gender-neutral washroom facilities. These facilities provide transgender students with a safe and affirming environment to meet their basic needs without fear of stigma or discrimination. By ensuring the availability of gender-neutral washrooms, educational institutions can uphold the principles of dignity, equality, and non-discrimination enshrined in the Protection of Transgender Persons Act 2019.

Additionally, principles of accessibility, inclusivity, and sensitivity to the various needs of transgender people should serve as a guide for infrastructure development efforts. This includes considering factors such as location, signage, privacy, and maintenance to create welcoming and functional spaces for all students, regardless of their gender identity.

Furthermore, it is imperative that both the infrastructural modifications and the necessary paperwork for student entrance and academic progression incorporate gender-neutral alternatives. According to the New Education Policy 2020 and the Protection of Transgender Persons Act 2019, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes transgender children as part of the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SEDGs) and ensures that they receive fair and high-quality education. This encompasses measures to facilitate the inclusion of transgender children in education, as well as support for community-based initiatives that target specific obstacles faced by transgender children in accessing and participating in education. The ultimate goal is to eradicate any existing inequality in educational opportunities, including vocational education, for children of all genders and other socially and economically disadvantaged groups. All content generated by NCERT, including the mentioned educational initiatives, is suitably included into the National Curriculum Frameworks.

The suggestion to create gender-neutral facilities in higher educational institutions is in line with the principles of ecological systems theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of physical environments in shaping individuals' experiences and interactions within their broader ecological context.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory postulates that a variety of interconnected systems in their environment, ranging from small-scale systems like immediate family and peer groups to larger-scale systems like cultural norms and societal structures, have an impact

on humans. This theory emphasizes the reciprocal influence that exists between people and their surroundings, whereby people have an impact on and are an impact on the environments in which they live.

Within the realm of higher educational institutions, the physical environment serves as a microsystem that has a direct influence on students' everyday experiences and overall well-being. Gender-neutral facilities, such as washrooms, are crucial in this context since they symbolize inclusivity and accommodation for transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals.

Universities foster an inclusive microsystem inside the campus environment by introducing gender-neutral facilities that recognize and validate the different identities of all students. This behavior is in accordance with the concepts of ecological systems theory, as it acknowledges the interdependent relationship between individuals and their ecosystems. More precisely, it recognizes that the physical surroundings can either support or impede individuals' feelings of belonging, security, and inclusion within their school community.

Additionally, the implementation of gender-neutral facilities has a role in the larger macrosystem by questioning societal expectations and fostering cultural changes that encourage more inclusivity and acknowledgement of gender variety. Universities demonstrate their dedication to promoting an environment of respect, fairness, and social justice for all members of the campus community by creating inclusive spaces in educational settings.

In conclusion, infrastructure development plays a crucial role in advancing the rights and protections of transgender individuals within higher educational institutions in accordance with the Protection of Transgender Persons Act 2019. By prioritizing the establishment of gender-neutral facilities and promoting awareness and understanding of gender diversity,



educational institutions can contribute to creating safe, inclusive, and affirming spaces for all students, regardless of their gender identity.

### 5.3.2 Implementing inclusive policies

Implementing inclusive policies in educational institutions is paramount for fostering environments that embrace and honor the diverse identities and experiences of LGBTQIA individuals. By prioritizing inclusivity, universities and colleges can create a supportive and affirming atmosphere where all students feel valued and respected.

One of the key aspects of inclusive policies is the promotion of a sense of belonging among LGBTQIA students. When educational institutions acknowledge and affirm the identities of LGBTQIA individuals, it sends a powerful message that they are an integral part of the campus community (Taylor & Peter, 2011). This sense of belonging is essential for LGBTQIA students' overall well-being and academic success. Inclusive policies also ensure that LGBTQIA students have equal access to resources and support systems. This includes access to LGBTQIA-affirming healthcare services, counseling and mental health support, and campus organizations and clubs that cater to the needs of LGBTQIA students. By providing these resources, educational institutions demonstrate their commitment to supporting the holistic development of all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Moreover, inclusive policies create opportunities for LGBTQIA students to thrive academically and personally. When students feel supported and affirmed in their identities, they are more likely to engage actively in their studies, participate in campus activities, and pursue leadership roles. Inclusive environments empower LGBTQIA students to explore their interests, pursue their passions, and achieve their full potential. By prioritizing inclusivity, educational institutions also play a crucial role in creating safe and supportive spaces for LGBTQIA students. These spaces serve as havens where LGBTQIA individuals can express

themselves authentically, without fear of discrimination or harassment. Safe and supportive environments are essential for LGBTQIA students' mental health and well-being, as they provide a sense of security and acceptance.

Social constructivism provides a valuable framework for understanding the implementation of inclusive policies within higher educational institutions. This theory emphasizes that knowledge and identity are socially constructed through interactions within specific cultural contexts, highlighting the importance of recognizing and challenging societal norms and values (Brown & Rasmussen, 2006). In the context of LGBTQIA+ inclusion, social constructivism underscores the need to deconstruct heteronormative assumptions and promote social change through policy development and implementation. Several studies have applied social constructivism to examine the impact of inclusive policies on LGBTQIA+ students' experiences in educational settings. For example, Brown and Rasmussen (2006) conducted a qualitative study exploring the implementation of LGBTQ-affirming policies in secondary schools. The researchers found that these policies played a crucial role in challenging heteronormative attitudes and fostering a more inclusive school climate, ultimately enhancing students' sense of belonging and well-being.

Similarly, a study by Taylor and Peter (2011) examined the effects of inclusive policies on LGBTQIA+ students' mental health outcomes in higher education. Using a social constructivist lens, the researchers found that universities with supportive policies and programs experienced lower levels of psychological distress among LGBTQIA+ students compared to institutions with less inclusive environments. This study highlights the transformative potential of inclusive policies in promoting positive mental health outcomes for LGBTQIA+ students.

In addition to empirical research, social constructivism-informed theoretical frameworks have been crucial in directing policy development efforts in educational settings. For instance, the concept of queer pedagogy, rooted in social constructivist principles, advocates for the integration of LGBTQIA+ perspectives and experiences into educational curricula (Brown & Rasmussen, 2006). By incorporating queer narratives and voices into teaching materials, educators can challenge dominant discourses and promote critical thinking about gender and sexuality.

In conclusion, implementing inclusive policies in educational institutions is essential for creating environments that support and respect the diverse identities and experiences of LGBTQIA individuals. By promoting a sense of belonging, providing equal access to resources and support systems, and creating opportunities for academic and personal growth, inclusive policies empower LGBTQIA students to thrive and succeed. Moreover, by prioritizing inclusivity, educational institutions foster safe and supportive spaces where all students can learn, grow, and flourish.

### 5.3.3 Implementing education and awareness initiatives

It is essential to introduce education and awareness programs in higher educational institutions to raise understanding among instructors, students, and non-teaching staff regarding the LGBTQIA+ community. These efforts foster a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere by promoting greater comprehension, compassion, and embrace of varied sexual orientations and gender identities.

An efficient strategy for delivering education and awareness campaigns involves the utilization of training programs designed for teachers and staff. These programs equip participants with comprehensive understanding of LGBTQIA+ vocabulary, challenges, and lived experiences, along with effective approaches for fostering inclusive classroom and

campus settings (Griffin & Croteau, 2018). The training sessions may encompass subjects such as unconscious bias, microaggressions, and the ramifications of heteronormativity and cisnormativity on LGBTQIA+ individuals.

In addition, educational institutions might arrange workshops, seminars, and panel discussions on LGBTQIA+ subjects to enhance awareness among students and staff. These events offer occasions for discourse, education, and contemplation, enabling attendees to interact with LGBTQIA+ matters in a nurturing and considerate setting (Rankin, 2017). Inviting guest speakers, such as LGBTQIA+ activists, scholars, and community leaders, can provide essential insights and views that enrich comprehension and consciousness.

Moreover, the incorporation of LGBTQIA+ topics into the curriculum is crucial for cultivating inclusivity and diversity in higher education. Enrolling in courses that focus on gender and sexuality studies, queer theory, and LGBTQIA+ history and literature allows students to delve deeply into LGBTQIA+ subjects and engage in a rigorous examination of matters pertaining to identity, discrimination, and social justice (Renn, 2010). By integrating LGBTQIA+ viewpoints into diverse academic fields, educational institutions showcase their dedication to fairness and societal transformation.

Universities and colleges can create LGBTQIA+ resource centers or offices to offer assistance, advocacy, and resources for LGBTQIA+ students, teachers, and staff, in addition to their formal education programs (Greytak et al., 2013). These centers function as secure and validating environments where individuals can obtain information, counseling, and chances for community development. In addition, they coordinate events and initiatives that commemorate LGBTQIA+ identities and promote understanding of LGBTQIA+ concerns among the university community.

Ultimately, education and awareness activities are crucial in raising awareness and understanding among professors, students, and non-teaching staff regarding the LGBTQIA+ community in higher education institutions. Educational institutions can foster inclusive and supportive settings for LGBTQIA+ individuals by implementing training programs, workshops, curriculum integration, and establishing LGBTQIA+ resource centers.

#### 5.3.4 Assistance, advocacy, and allyship programs

Educational institutions have a vital role in promoting the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals through the creation of an inclusive and supportive campus environment. It is crucial to prioritize the mental well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals since they may encounter distinct difficulties and encounters as a consequence of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. Discrimination, stigma, and social marginalization can have a significant negative impact on the mental health of LGBTQIA+ people. Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to establish comprehensive support networks. Ensuring the mental health and well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals is of utmost importance for educational institutions in order to establish an inclusive and friendly campus environment. This dedication not only promotes a feeling of inclusion but also tackles the distinct obstacles and hindrances encountered by LGBTQIA+ students, educators, and staff. Implementing "Assistance and Advocacy and Allyship Programs" is essential for establishing comprehensive support networks, facilitating the reporting of misconduct, providing ally training programs, and advocating for the voices of LGBTQIA+ individuals. An imperative for educational institutions is to prioritize the provision of mental health support for LGBTQIA+ individuals due to the significantly higher prevalence of mental health disorders within this population. Extensive research has consistently demonstrated that those who identify as LGBTQIA+ face a greater likelihood of encountering mental health difficulties,

including depression, anxiety, and suicidal tendencies, in comparison to those who identify as heterosexual and cisgender (Meyer, 2003; Marshal et al., 2011). These differences might be ascribed to a range of variables, such as stigma, discrimination, social exclusion, and the stress experienced by minority groups.

Assistance and Advocacy Programs are crucial in offering prompt aid and resources to LGBTQIA+ individuals who may be encountering mental health difficulties or confronting discrimination. These programs frequently encompass private counseling sessions, immediate response to emergencies, and recommendations to specialized mental health experts. Educational institutions showcase their dedication to the well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals and establish a secure environment for seeking mental health assistance by providing easily accessible and supportive services, free from prejudice or bias.

Furthermore, Allyship Programs play a crucial role in fostering a culture of assistance and inclusivity within educational institutions. These programs provide instruction and knowledge to students, instructors, and staff regarding LGBTQIA+ matters, vocabulary, and optimal methods for becoming supportive supporters. Allyship Programs empower members of the campus community by providing them with the knowledge and skills to advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights and combat discrimination. This enables individuals to actively contribute to the creation of a more inclusive environment. Moreover, it is crucial to champion the perspectives of LGBTQIA+ individuals and tackle structural obstacles in order to establish enduring transformation within educational institutions. This can encompass activities such as advocating for policies, conducting awareness campaigns, and collaborating with LGBTQIA+ organizations and community groups. By magnifying the perspectives of LGBTQIA+ individuals and tackling systemic disparities, educational institutions can strive to establish a fairer and more nurturing campus environment for everyone.

Ultimately, it is crucial for educational institutions to prioritize their dedication to promoting the mental health and overall well-being of LGBTQIA+ individuals in order to cultivate a campus atmosphere that is all-encompassing, validating, and encouraging. By implementing Assistance, Advocacy, and Allyship Programs, educational institutions can offer crucial support systems, resources, and advocacy initiatives that specifically target the distinct needs and obstacles encountered by LGBTQIA+ individuals. By giving utmost importance to the provision of mental health assistance, fostering the practice of supporting and standing up for one another, and actively encouraging changes in the overall system, educational institutions can establish a fair and all-encompassing atmosphere that enables every member of society to flourish.

#### 5.3.5 Monitoring and evaluation systems

Establishing effective monitoring and evaluation systems is essential for educational institutions to assess the impact of infrastructure development projects and identify areas for improvement or additional assistance. Through the collection of data on the implementation of gender-neutral restrooms, incidents of bias or mistreatment, and overall satisfaction levels among LGBTQIA+ students, institutions can facilitate informed decision-making and policy development. In order to foster a positive and academic environment in higher education institutions, it is crucial to establish connections with LGBTQIA student organizations, advocacy groups, and relevant stakeholders. This will allow for the collection of valuable input, the addressing of issues, and the collaboration on initiatives aimed at promoting inclusivity.

An effective approach for implementing monitoring and evaluation systems is to establish regular data collection processes. One approach is to gather feedback from LGBTQIA+ students through surveys, interviews, or focus groups. This will help evaluate their

experiences and level of satisfaction with the current facilities and support services. Through the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, institutions have the opportunity to gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of their current initiatives and pinpoint areas that could benefit from improvement.

In addition, it is crucial to prioritize the confidentiality and anonymity of participants in order to foster an environment that promotes open and sincere feedback. Valuing the privacy and confidentiality of LGBTQIA+ students is crucial in establishing trust and maintaining the integrity of the data gathered. Furthermore, educational institutions have the opportunity to work together with LGBTQIA student organizations, advocacy groups, and other relevant stakeholders to gather valuable input and insights. These collaborations offer insightful insights into the needs and obstacles encountered by LGBTQIA+ students, aiding in the identification of potential solutions and initiatives to tackle them. In addition, the successful implementation of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms relies on continuous communication and collaboration among different stakeholders. Regular meetings, forums, or working groups are excellent opportunities to foster discussions, exchange findings, and collectively devise strategies to enhance inclusivity and provide support for LGBTQIA+ students. Ultimately, it is crucial to integrate feedback and insights obtained through monitoring and evaluation processes into decision-making and policy formation. Through the utilization of data-driven approaches, educational institutions have the ability to effectively address the needs of LGBTQIA+ students by prioritizing resources, allocating funding, and implementing targeted interventions. It is crucial for educational institutions to establish comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems. These systems play a vital role in assessing the effectiveness of infrastructure development projects and supporting initiatives that foster inclusivity for LGBTQIA+ students. Through the collection of data, collaboration



with stakeholders, and integration of feedback into decision-making processes, institutions have the ability to foster a supportive, inclusive, and welcoming environment for all students.

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## **Appendix I**

### **CONSENT FORM**

I..... voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

I understand that participation involves describing my experiences at my educational institution.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

I understand that in any report on the results of this research, my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview that may reveal my identity or the identities of people I speak about.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in my dissertation, conference presentation, published papers, etc.



I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained by researchers until May 2024.

Signature of the research participant

Date

Signature of the researcher I believe the participant has provided informed consent to participate in this study.

Signature of researcher date

## Appendix II

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **Getting to Know You:**

1. So, tell me a bit about yourself. What's your preferred gender identity and pronouns?
2. What drew you to your current educational institution? Did you have any specific expectations or hopes when you joined?

#### **Your Experiences:**

##### *Closeted*

3. Have you ever fear being out in your institution or fear of judgement that you wont be accepted as it should in the institution.

##### *out*

4. Have you ever faced bullying, discrimination in the school, college or university or comments like “thats so gay” .
5. Do you avoid expressing your gender identity for fear of negative reaction from others ?  
If yes, where do you avoid ?
6. Most serious incidence if happened ? how did you navigated ? did you try to report it?

#### **Safe Spaces:**

6. Do you feel your teachers and peers are fully aware about the LGBTQIA+ community and their struggles
7. Were sexual orientation and gender identity discussed at the institution in lessons, educational workshops or any other part of the curriculum.

8.what kind of initiatives or changes would you make to ensure the school is a safe and inclusive space for everyone?

9.Are there any existing support systems or resources that you've found helpful? Or do you have ideas on what the school and universities could provide to better support LGBTQIA+ students?

**Closing Thoughts:**

10.Is there something you'd like to share about your journey as an LGBTQIA+ student at this institution that we haven't covered? Any thoughts or experiences you want to highlight?