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A CALL TO LOVE:  
CAMPUS CLIMATE CONCERNING INDIVIDUALS WITH SAME-SEX ATTRACTION  
(SSA)  
A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE HONORS COLLEGE OF SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY  
BY  
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LAKELAND, FLORIDA  
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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the impact of campus climate concerning students with same-sex attraction at Southeastern University. The current study surveyed Southeastern undergraduate and graduate students in regards to the perceived attitudes on campus toward students with same-sex attraction (SSA). The major concern was to identify the *majority attitude* of administrators, faculty, staff, and students pertaining to the treatment of this sexual minority on campus by these particular groups and in major areas of the campus, such as the classroom, athletics, and chapel. This study also allotted the latter half of the survey to an anonymous questionnaire for students who identify as bisexual or homosexual. This section inquired on these students' demographics concerning their SSA and allowed for open-ended responses for students to express their feelings concerning campus climate, their Christian walk, and how the university could better assist students who struggle and/or identify with this sexual minority.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a world where sexual promiscuity invades our entertainment, politics, and casual conversations, homosexuality has become a common occurrence among this generation and a hot topic among Christians. Many denominations have taken various stances concerning the debate on same-sex attraction (and related topics), and numerous authors have tried to tackle this ever-persisting “sexual deviance.” However, one voice that has remained silent in the debate, but stern in their positions, is the Christian colleges and universities across America. Many of these schools have enforced student handbook rules that forbid “homosexual behavior” and have openly discussed in the classroom and in chapel the severity of such sexual misconduct, often hovering on the verge of contempt.

Yet, within the dorms of these schools are students who feel excluded, condemned, and hurt by the secret they are forced to keep by their college or university. Many fear the result of “coming out” to their peers and/or professors, worrying that they will be rejected, scorned, or forced to attend mandatory counseling. This anxiety causes students to miss out on the opportunities that Christian colleges and universities offer in spiritual development and growth. How is it that these students have been overlooked by the community which is suppose to love and support all who call upon the name of the Lord? Why have Christian colleges and universities not taken a more active role in reaching students with same-sex attraction?

These questions and more are what stemmed this thesis endeavor to investigate Southeastern University’s campus climate concerning individuals with same-sex attraction (SSA). The purpose of this thesis is to examine the perceived attitudes by Southeastern undergraduate and graduate students on this university’s treatment of and toward students with SSA. In order to fully investigate this topic, a literature review will be performed concerning the

areas of: theology pertaining to SSA/homosexuality, studies of interest regarding the LGBT (common term for: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community, and other campus climate studies performed on the experiences of LGBT students. Following the literature review will be the analysis of my campus-wide survey and its results discussed in length as it pertains to the general student body and the subpopulation of students with SSA. The hope of this thesis is to bring awareness to an overlooked student subpopulation in Christian colleges and universities and to provide recommendations for assisting and supporting these students in spiritual growth during their collegiate education.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

When venturing into the world of Christians struggling with SSA there are three major bodies of work that require focus. The first involves the theological doctrines that seem to have enabled the beginning of the debate between these two entities and those struggling amid the cross-section. For years the historical Scriptures of the Bible have been argued among theologians and stirred controversy among scientists, thus, the basic foundation will be provided and the countering theologies can be introduced to better examine the confusion surrounding them. The second body of thought to be considered in this endeavor is relevant studies concerning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) individuals and the relationship they hold with religion, specifically Christianity. These studies will be given a brief overview of their impact on both the LGBT community and Christianity and the relevance they hold for Christians attempting to aid individuals with SSA. Finally, preceding campus climate studies concerning LGBT individuals will be evaluated for similar findings, corresponding themes, and recommendations for campus improvement.

When dealing with any topic regarding Christianity, it is imperative to seek out the Bible's stance on the subject to establish precedent. In the area of homosexuality, five areas of Scripture are commonly referred to among traditional Christian thinkers. The first is Genesis 19:1-29 which details the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah due to their innumerable sins against the Lord, particularly that of suggested homosexuality. Following, are the guidelines of the Holiness Code found in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that explicitly forbid same-sex relations among men as an abomination to the Lord worthy of death. Jumping to the New Testament, Romans 1:24-27 declares that God gave humans up to their lustful desires found in "unnatural relations" with the same gender, labeling them as "dishonorable passions." Finally, 1 Corinthians

6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 contain vice lists including the phrase “men practicing homosexuality.” Though these Scriptural references are not the only ones applicable to the discussion of homosexuality as found in the Bible, they can be labeled as the most commonly used among scholars on both sides of the debate.

In support of the traditional or orthodox interpretation of Scriptures as it pertains to homosexuality, Dr. Robert A. J. Gagnon’s article *Scriptural Perspectives on Homosexuality and Sexual Identity* (2005) takes the key Biblical references and applies them to the overarching theme of God’s love and mercy displayed in the Bible as a whole. Gagnon emphasizes death to self through Jesus Christ and what he refers to as “The Psychology of the Four Laws” which highlight “the law of God-as given to Moses”, “the “law” of one’s mind-the inner person”, “the “law” of sin-and death operating in the flesh”, and “the “law” of the Spirit-of life in Christ Jesus” (p. 295). Through his intense scriptural analysis, Gagnon defines true identity as being found in Christ and not sexual orientation. Another advocate in this area is Samuel H. Dressner with his article *Homosexuality and the Order of Creation* (2001). Through this work, Dressner presents homosexuality as a violation to God’s set order of creation by going against the sacred and covenant relationship of man and wife as established in Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:18-24. Dressner also highlights the key passages in Genesis 19 and Leviticus 18 and 20, but special attention should be given to his analysis of Noah and the flood found in Genesis 6:18, 7:7, 13, and 8:16, 18. According to Dressner, this passage presents the biblical fundamental standards for sexual deviance and how it destroyed the world and God’s restoration of order through a monogamous family vessel. P.D.M. Turner also works in this vein of theology and provides an investigation into the Hebrew and Greek translations of the key passages on homosexuality in her article *Biblical Texts Relevant to Homosexual Orientation and Practice: Notes on Philology and*



*Interpretation* (1997). Turner's philological approach allows analysis of the literature in order to establish its authority and original form to determine its meaning. Highlights of this article include in depth analysis of ambiguous Hebrew and Greek words, potential meaning behind these core passages, and relating them to the Bible as a whole to determine a verdict on homosexual conduct. Finally, Ray Sherman Anderson, a respected former professor emeritus of theology and ministry at Fuller University, analyzes the existing arguments surrounding the theological debate concerning homosexuality and Christianity in a chapter of his book *The Shape of Practical Theology*. In this chapter Anderson examines the "key" scriptures that mention homosexuality in the Bible, their implications to the two viewpoints held by society concerning the topic, and then applies a model of theological assumptions pertaining to each. The two models argue from the perspective of whether or not human sexual differentiation is included in the divine image of God in man. From Anderson's perspective, he argues that human sexuality is an "ordered ontology" (p. 275) where "The essential order of differentiation that constitutes the divine image is not determined by biological sexual characteristics but is 'expressed' through one's biological nature" (p. 277). Thus, homosexuality does not correspond with the divine image of God and is viewed as a "tragic aspects of the human sexual experience as well as of the divine intention regarding it" (p. 280). Yet, God's redemption is still available for those who are willing to take the responsibility of making good choices in accordance to His Word. These sources establish the traditional/orthodox Christian perspective in regards to same-sex practice, and thus one side of the struggle for Christians with SSA.

In the opposing corner, arguments are being made that these key Scriptures may not truly condemn present day homosexuality. Resident Minister at Central Christian Church, Jacob M. Caldwell, contributes to this debate with his article *The Viability of Christian Same-Sex Unions:*

*Why Scripturally Normed Faith Communities Must Support Homosexual Relationships* (2010). Caldwell contends that hermeneutical interpretations of Biblical texts concerning homosexuality have been misinterpreted and that the current Christian and societal stance of same-sex unions clings to concepts that are sparse and unstable. Overall, the author proclaims that Scripture (Ephesians 5:29-32) supports acceptance of all in the body of Christ and that sexuality (no matter its orientation) is a gift from God as we are made in His image. Dr. Gwen Sayler continues in this perspective with her article *Beyond the Biblical Impasse: Homosexuality Through the Lens of Theological Anthropology* (2005) in which she argues toward interpreting biblical passages in favor of the historical context in which it was written and cultural undertones assumed by the writer. Sayler concludes key passages of Scripture (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, Romans 1:24-27, 1 Corinthians 1:9, and 1 Timothy 1:10) do not truly refer to homosexuality, but rather to the importance of gender roles to the Hebrew culture. Another concurring opinion is found in Ken Stone's article *Bibles That Matter: Biblical Theology and Queer Performativity* (2008). Stone leans on the works of Judith Butler in regards to her idea of 'queer performativity' defining gender as a verb, not a noun on the grounds that "gender is performative-that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be....gender is always doing" (p. 17). From this Stone engages in the idea of 'queer theologies' that would allow for diversity in the field of biblical hermeneutics, such as queer theology as a subfield of biblical interpretation. Concluding in this area of thought, David C. Robinson engages the Judeo-Christian traditions of word, rite, and moral action as harmful practices toward the reality of homosexual lifestyles in his article *Metaphors of Love, Love as a Metaphor: Language, Ritual, and Moral Agency in the Theological Politics of Identity* (2000). Through this analysis, Robinson declares that tradition, as seen and practiced by the

orthodox Church, infringes on a universal interpretation of “love” and that a “humanly holistic” (p. 77) approach to diversity is needed for acceptance of homosexuality within the Church.

Yet aside from theological debate, many individuals have worked from the realm of science and psychology to better understand the relationship between LGBT individuals and religion, with specific focus on Christianity. Bernard E Whitley, Jr of Ball State University conducted a meta-analysis in 2009 that analyzed 61 studies concerning religiosity and correlating attitudes toward homosexuals. The meta-analysis concluded that religiosity was closely related to “prejudices that religions permit, such as prejudice against lesbians and gay men, than to prejudices that religions proscribe, such as racial/ethnic prejudice” (p. 28). The reasoning behind this was seen due to the religions’ doctrines that teach against homosexuality as well as moderate variables including: beliefs about the nature of homosexuality, perceived threat, and right-wing authoritarianism. As it can be seen from this study, homosexuality can be a touchy topic for either party of the debate.

Continuing on in the relationship between LGBT individuals and religion, scientists have been fighting for years to prove a biological source of predisposition to same-sex attraction. Though their arguments have been compelling and have stirred much controversy in both the scientific and Christian circles, the article *Scientific Research, Homosexuality, and the Church’s Moral Debate: An Update* sought to reevaluate the church’s stance on homosexuality in light of the present scientific data. Stanton L. Jones, renowned author in the topic of homosexuality and science/psychology, and Alex W. Kwee provided an overview of Jones & Yarhouse’s review of scientific research including: “behavioral genetics, genetic scanning, human brain structure studies, studies of ‘gay sheep’ and ‘gay fruit flies,’ fraternal birth order research, and familial structure impact.” Jones and Kwee concluded that their updated review held the same findings as

Jones & Yarhouse: that biological causation for homosexuality cannot be accurately proven and that there is more proof for environment variables. Therefore, the authors agreed that there is no solid scientific reasoning that should sway the traditional and scriptural belief that homosexuality is immoral.

And still more controversy arises from Christians who attempt to “change” the sexual orientation of those who profess to have SSA. In the article *The “Religiously Mediated Change” of 11 Gay Men: A Case of Unexception Sublimation*, Donald Capps and Nathan Carlin critique Pattison and Pattison’s study of eleven men who supposedly experienced a sexual orientation change from exclusive homosexuality to exclusive heterosexuality. In examining the methodology of the original study, the authors found that there was an absence of a control group, evidence of sampling bias and instability, as well as interview bias. The results were also found to be unrepresentative of the entire group from which the eleven men were selected, the mean ages of the men opposing to previous studies, and possible inaccuracies implied by the Kinsey scale as the “objective test.” The authors concluded that the implications of the Pattison and Pattison study was more likely to prove that the eleven men experienced a form of sexual sublimation, “a denial of socially unacceptable sexual energy or libido that is transferred to a non-instinctual, socially acceptable activity” (141) than an absolute claim of sexual orientation change. Due to Pattison and Pattison’s study, the Christian community as strained their relationship not only with LGBT individuals, but also with the scientific community becoming an object of scorn and derision.

All is not lost, though when it comes to relating LGBT individuals with Christianity. Within the scientific realm there are the few Christians who do their best to bridge the gap between science and religion. Dr. Mark A. Yarhouse is among these names and is a respected

professor at Regent University, author of numerous books on Christianity and SSA, and developer of the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity as part of the doctoral program in clinical psychology at Regent. In his article *Integration in the Study of Homosexuality, GLBT Issues, and Sexual Identity* (2012) Yarhouse gives a state of address to Christian work in the areas listed in the title. According to Yarhouse, progress has been made on the levels of scholarly review articles, original empirical research, role integration—"the issues Christians face when adopting a role—often a public role in the field of psychology, in the field of psychology" (p. 108), and clinical practice/applied clinical integration. However, he also states that more work needs to be done to accommodate for multicultural competence, role integration in the area of compartmentalization, accurate and thorough theological reflections and integration, greater credibility through continuance in clinical practice and/or empirical study, and in third-way narratives of Christians struggling with SSA but who do not wish to convert to heterosexuality. In his article *Round Peg, Square Hole: Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies* (2009) Yarhouse discusses the challenges faced by those who profess Christ as Savior and seek to relate their beliefs to science and introduces his concept of *convicted civility* which is "the idea that Christians hold and express their convictions, but do so in the spirit of respect and humility" (p. 8). Yarhouse also presents the idea of a *three-tier distinction* concerning sexual identity in which a crucial distinction is made "between sexual attractions, a homosexual orientation, and a gay identity" (Yarhouse, 2009). Commentaries on this article also provide insight to joining theology and science. Andrew Comiskey's *Turning Towards the Imago Dei* (2011) views the issue as primarily theological rather than psychological. Comiskey states that we are bearers of God's image and, thus, must align ourselves with "the Kingdom reality" (p.13) in order to fully serve God as His disciple. H. Newton Malony's *Sexual Diversity: A Challenge for Counselors* (2011)

suggests that we need to better “mind the gap” between science in theology as two different things which “both are important; but both are qualitatively distinct” (p. 19). Also, Kathleen Y. Ritter’s *As the Years Go On: A Response to Round Peg, Square Hole* (2011) expresses that Yarhouse needs to better stress the importance of community. Ritter states that the Church needs to act as a loving community that provides support for individuals struggling with SSA and that “only in such an environment can people be totally honest about their attractions” (p. 23). Finally, is Yarhouse & Carr’s *The Exemplar Project: Finding What Makes a Church Exemplary in its Ministry to Persons who Experience Same-Sex Attraction or who Struggle with Sexual Identity Concerns* (2011). For this case study twenty-eight church-based ministries and one stand-alone participated in an online survey and from this five ministries were selected and asked for further research through visitation. Three types of ministries were then determined based on the results of the survey: *ministries to brokenness*-support the view of SSA as a result of human brokenness in need of healing, *welcoming but not affirming*-love and acceptance of all people but do not validate same-sex practice, and *gay affirmative*-find support for same-sex practice in the Bible. Thus, from these articles there can be seen a sapling of hope growing in the scientific world bearing the image of Christ and yearning to share with the world His immeasurable love.

A final area of review for this literary critique involves preceding campus climate studies concerning LGBT individuals at public and private universities and colleges. To begin with an article by Gilda Lopez and Nancy Van Note Chism, *Classroom Concerns of Gay and Lesbian Students*, conducted a study of sixteen students who identified as gay or lesbian at Ohio State University and their concerns regarding the treatment of homosexuality on campus. Many students identified the coming out process as a difficult milestone that may affect academic performance. Students also discussed that the use of labels was important noting that the term

homosexual was too “clinical” and that the terms gay men, lesbian women and bisexual man or women were favored more. The article identified teachers as a “key factor of the college experience of students” (p. 4) and that they should uphold a responsibility to foster a safe and comfortable community within the classroom for all students. The article concludes with recommendations for teachers to become more educated on the needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual students in the classroom and how to counter homophobic attitudes. Kerry John Poynter and Jamie Washington contributed in the same idea arguing that students who identify as having same-sex attraction as well as identifying with a race and/or faith struggle with multiple identities. They argue that community must be within affirming environments, but that identity development within the LGBT, Faith, and Racial communities may impede on multiple identity cohesion. Poynter and Washington state that student affairs administrators “must be fully engaged in creating a cross-cultural community that is just, civil, and open” (p. 46).

In light of these minor studies, a few major studies have been held to investigate campus climate concerning LGBT individuals from large-scale university, nation wide, and global levels. Dr. Robert D. Brown and Carl A. Happold conducted a ‘Needs Assessment Study’ at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 2002 that focused on campus climate toward its LGBT students. Project questions focused on anti-GLBT attitudes, experiences of GLBT students on campus during 2001-2002, empowerment of GLBT students and UNL’s commitment to diversity, improvement of campus climate for GLVT students, campus climate differed by academic class or gender, and suggestions for how UNL can continue to assist GLBT students. Results of the study showed verbal harassment as the number one form of abuse towards LGBT students, other students identified as the major perpetrators of these crimes, and a general sense of overwhelming homophobia on campus. Similar results were concluded from Susan R.

Rankin's *Campus Climate for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People: A National Perspective* that involved 14 universities or colleges in the USA. The 1,669 participants represented undergraduate and graduate students as well as staff, administrators, and faculty who identified as being a GLBT member. The participants answered a survey concerning "lived oppressive experiences", "perceptions of anti-GLBT oppression on campus", and "institutional actions". Results showed high levels of harassment, especially verbal, high perceptions of anti-GLBT oppression, and a high amount of participants who agree that their college/university did not "thoroughly address issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity". The author concludes that more research needs to be conducted and that the results of this study and future studies should be used to create progressive universities focused on knowledge contributed from people of all colors of life. And to a global scale, Sonja J. Ellis responded to the large interest in campus climate concerning LGBT individuals with *Diversity and inclusivity at university: A survey of the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans (LGBT) students in the UK*. The study focused on four topics: actual harassment/discrimination, perceptions of campus climate, campus climate and outness, and LGBT inclusiveness. Results yielded that while homophobia is "not an overwhelming problem, it is still a significant one." Respondents to the study's questionnaire yet again identified verbal harassment as the most reoccurring form of LGBT target on campus harassment with fellow students identified as the majority perpetrators. Respondents also noted that they often felt they needed to conceal their sexual identity while on campus, but felt that the university was overall supportive of LGBT inclusiveness. Ellis concludes that a zero tolerance policy of all forms of prejudice needs to be implemented as well as universities needing to be more proactive in addressing diversity issues.



These campus climate studies present an eye-opening reality that discrimination of individuals with SSA is an unfortunately common experience for LGBT individuals across the world. Yet, an even smaller subpopulation can be further dissected from this group concerning students with SSA at Christian colleges or universities. Dr. Yarhouse's article *Listening to sexual minorities on Christian College Campuses* provides an in depth analysis regarding milestone events and campus culture for individuals in this rare subpopulation. Research from an online survey with 104 participants from 3 Council of Christian Colleges and University schools raised interesting results regarding the unheard voices of these sexual minorities. Under milestone events, research yielded that most did not feel different from their peers concerning sexual identity formation, that early emotional responses were feelings of shame, fear, and confusion, and that this sample mostly attributed the 'cause' of their same-sex attraction to environmental or "nurture" influence (p. 108). It can also be stated under milestones that the sample revealed being more comfortable disclosing their feelings to friends rather than to family and that such were "satisfying and tended to be shame-reducing" (p. 109). Campus climate results yielded that the overall feel on these Christian college campuses were largely negative in relation to same-sex attraction. Discussion was held mainly outside the classroom resulting in derogatory and stereotyping speech and awareness of campus resources varied as well as usage. The concern of invisibility of this sexual minority on Christian campuses was also addressed for needing further investigation.

Another study that sought to address the struggles of Christian college students with SSA was *An Analysis of the Collegiate Experience of Gay and Lesbian Students Enrolled In Faith-Based Higher Education* by Joel M. Wentz. The study involved three faith-based institutions that qualified for membership in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and consisted of

a sample of eight students from these institutions. The method involved a qualitative and phenomenological methodology to allow for deep explanation focusing on the experiences of a group of people rather than a single individual and data was collected through personal interviews with self-identified gay and lesbian college students. The results discussed specific aspects of the students' collegiate experiences, as well as the role the university played within this experience. In respect to aspects of their experiences, students identified identity denial, perceptions of homosexuality on campus, exposure to peers outside the campus culture, concealing sexual identity, and establishing an on-campus support network as influencing experiences they faced as a sexual minority at a Christian college student. In respect to the role of the university in these experiences, students identified support from faculty and staff members, counseling services, school handbook and policies, male residence hall culture, and interactions with administrators as influencing parts of the university in these students' experiences in this Christian college subpopulation. The study concluded that students need to be better informed regarding school policies of homosexual behavior when enrolling to a Christian college, that sexual identity formation is a large part of the collegiate experience, and that there needs to be a stronger sense of reconciling faith and sexual identity on Christian college campuses. The study also suggests that these institutions need to encourage supportive networks for gay and lesbian students and my need to reexamine their policy development regarding sexual behavior on campus.

In conclusion, the debate surrounding the theology behind homosexuality may have sparked the controversy between the Christian and LGBT community, and the activity with the scientific realm concerning LGBT individuals and religion may have added fuel to that fire, but these reasons do not allow for the inferno that students with SSA at Christian colleges and universities feel they are forced to live in despite the loving and supportive atmospheres these

institutions are suppose to uphold. In light of the literature reviewed for this thesis, I further imply my belief that more awareness needs to be brought to this sexual minority that is overlooked due to social taboos and religious pride. Thus, I present my thesis project that was conducted this past spring at Southeastern University involving the campus climate concerning individuals with SSA.

## METHODOLOGY

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was twofold. The first objective was to gain an understanding of the campus climate regarding students with SSA at a Christian university. The study's goal was to identify the majority attitude of how the university as a whole is perceived through the eyes of their students. The second objective was to gain qualitative data from students who have SSA who attend Southeastern University and their experiences with campus climate while they have been at college. This information was studied to better equip faculty and staff members in faith-based institutions for working with students who identify as having SSA.

### Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions.

- What is the *majority attitude* concerning the campus climate toward individuals with SSA at Southeastern University?
- How is the university perceived through the eyes of students with SSA?
- What ministries can be offered on Christian college campuses to better reach those students with SSA?

### Design of the Study

#### Research Method

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative was used in the first half of the study to gather information on the campus climate in order to gain a broader understanding of on campus students' perceptions of the university toward students with

SSA. However, qualitative methodologies were necessary for the second half of the study that asked students who have SSA to give more in depth answers regarding their demographics and their experience as a student with SSA at Southeastern University. Through these methods I hoped to acquire a general idea of where students perceive the university to be at concerning students with SSA and the individual experiences of students who have SSA and how they have been affected by the university's attitude.

### **Setting**

This study was conducted at Southeastern University located in Lakeland, Florida. Southeastern is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, an international association of intentionally faith-based institutions of higher education throughout the United States. Southeastern University is a university of the Assemblies of God, but allows enrollment to students of a variety of denominations. However, they strive to "preserve the evangelical and Pentecostal heritage and message of the Assemblies of God" as stated in their Institutional Goals on their official university website. Beginning as a Bible college in 1935, Southeastern University has since grown to offer four-year bachelor degrees as well as masters and doctorate degrees. Southeastern's mission statement is "Equipping students to discover and develop their divine design to serve Christ and the world through Spirit-empowered life, learning, and leadership." For the purpose of this study, it is important to mention that the stance of the Assemblies of God denomination toward homosexuality is the belief "that God has declared great displeasure and opposition toward homosexual *conduct*," according to the official Assemblies of God USA website.

## **Participants**

Participants of this study identified themselves as full-time, on campus undergraduate or graduate students of Southeastern University. For the first portion of the study, students of all sexual orientations were welcome to participate in gauging their perceptions of the university's attitude toward students with SSA. However, only students who identified as having SSA were asked to continue in the second half of the survey to describe in more detail their experience as a student at Southeastern University and the affects of the university's attitude toward students with SSA on them. Of the 392 participants that answered the first portion of the survey, with a variation between 25 and 30 participants answering questions in the second portion of the survey.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

My Principle Investigator and myself collected the data for this study via online survey that was designed on [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) through Southeastern University's online account. The survey was designed in questionnaire format with a cross-sectional intent to accumulate information regarding the student populations' perceptions as of March of 2013. The questions were divided into two sections with the first open for all students to answer regarding campus climate toward individuals with SSA and the second section specifically designed for students who have SSA. The questions for the first section included demographics, personal beliefs concerning SSA, personal perceptions of Southeastern's campus climate, and their overall majority attitude concerning the campus climate of Southeastern University concerning individuals with SSA. The questions for the second section covered more in depth demographic questions, personal religious/spiritual beliefs, and Southeastern focused questions assessing the university's majority attitude and the effects it has had on them during their time at college.

Stylization of questions in the first section ranged from single selection to selecting all that apply. The campus climate questions followed a Likert scale with a ranking system of Highly Unacceptable, Moderately Unacceptable, Slightly Unacceptable, Slightly Acceptable, Moderately Acceptable, and Highly Acceptable to assess the attitudes of various positions on campus and the treatment of students in various areas of the university. The overall majority attitude was then asked to be ranked on the same scale by each participant in response to his or her previously ranked answers. The second section of the study featured question stylization in the form of select one, select as many as apply, and open-ended responses. Open-ended responses were highly utilized in this section to glean a better understanding of personal affects the university's attitude has had on students with SSA.

Students received access to the survey via their university email accounts and were given two weeks to participate and fill out the questionnaire. Results were collected through the survey host website, [www.surveymonkey](http://www.surveymonkey.com), and at the close of the survey were transferred to a Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) software program securely located on the Principle Investigator's computer. SPSS served to provide numerical evaluations of the data, but was not able to provide accurate analysis for the open-ended questions of the second portion of the survey. These questions were analyzed into clusters by common ideas, beliefs, or experiences and will be further discussed in the results and discussion sections of this thesis.

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

The total number of the sample for this study included 352 participants that engaged in the first portion of this survey directed to all Southeastern students, with a range of 25 to 30 participants engaging in the second portion of the survey directed to students with SSA. For proper and accurate recording of results, the demographic findings for the total sample population will be recorded in this section of the thesis and the more detailed demographics of the SSA subpopulation will be recorded in a following section.

Of the 392 participants of the first part of the Campus Climate survey, 251 (65%) were female and 135 (35%) were male. The majority of the respondents (330) identified as being 18 to 22 (85.1%), with a significant response from the 23 to 30 age range (41/10.6%) and smaller representations for the 31 to 40 (5/1.3%), 41 to 50 (8/2.1%), 51 to 60 (3/0.8%), 61 to 70 (0/0.0%), and 71 and older (1/0.3%) age brackets. In terms of race/ethnicity, the majority (302) was found to be White (78.2%) followed by 36 Hispanics (9.3%), 20 Blacks (5.2%), 20 Mixed (5.2%), 5 Asians (1.3%), and 3 Others (0.8%). Marital status saw the majority (350) as single (90.9%) with representative numbers as married (33/8.6%) and Divorced (2/0.5%). Academic status saw a somewhat even playing field with 78 freshmen (20.3%), 91 sophomores (23.7%), 90 juniors (23.4%), and 106 seniors (27.6%). The only drastic difference in academic status representation was in graduate students at 19 participants (4.9%). Employment status saw a wide variation with the following representatives: employed full time (40+ hours a week) at 23 participants (10.5%), employed part time (39 hours or less a week) at 189 participants (86.3%), homemaker at 1 participant (0.3%), retired at 3 participants (1.4%), and disabled or not able to work at 3 participants (1.4%). Sexual orientation was as to be expected with 358 participants



(93%) selecting heterosexual, but the answers for the following categories showed interesting results: 9 homosexual-practicing (2.3%), 2 homosexual-not practicing (0.5%), 2 bisexual-practicing (0.5%), and 14 bisexual-not practicing (3.6%).

The following demographics included information regarding religious/spiritual background information of the first section's 392 participants. Participants were asked if they were practicing Christians and results showed 373 (97.9%) answering 'yes', 7 (1.8%) answering 'no', and 1 (0.3% answering) 'other'. Home church denomination standings were as follows: Catholic-3 (0.8%), Baptist-35 (9.1%), Southern Baptist-24 (6.1%), Pentecostal-43 (11.2%), Assemblies of God-141 (36.7%), Presbyterian-12 (3.1%), Lutheran-1 (0.3%), Methodist-17 (4.4%), Church of God-8 (2.1%), Non-Denominational-29 (7.6%), Other-28 (7.3%), and None-43 (11.2%). Religious upbringing saw 263 (70.3%) of participants being raised in church since childhood with parents/guardians not employed by the church. Other results showed 70 (18.7%) being brought up as pastors' or missionaries' children and 41 (11%) not being raised in church at all.

### **Personal Attitudes toward SSA**

Participants were asked what their personal attitude toward the "morality" of SSA was and results showed 179 (47.2%) holding SSA to be highly unacceptable, 80 (21.1%) holding to moderately unacceptable, 35 (9.2%) holding to slightly unacceptable, 26 (6.9%) holding to slightly acceptable, 28 (7.4%) holding to moderately acceptable, and 31 (8.2%) holding to highly acceptable. Participants were then asked their personal attitudes regarding people "who act on" their SSA and results showed 214 (54.6%) holding people who act on their SSA as highly unacceptable, 60 (15.9%) holding to moderately unacceptable, 31 (8.2%) holding to slightly

unacceptable, 13 (3.4%) holding to slightly acceptable, 35 (9.3%) holding to moderately acceptable, and 25 (6.6%) holding to highly acceptable.

### **Climate Description**

Participants were then asked to gauge the perceived attitude of the following Southeastern University (SEU) categories toward SSA on the designated Likert scale: administrators (university President, Provost, Dean of College), faculty (professors, associate professors), staff (admissions, academic advising, mail room staff), and students (undergraduate and graduate). Perceived attitudes of SEU administration were recorded as 225 (62%) seeing them as highly unacceptable, 70 (19.3%) as moderately unacceptable, 14 (3.9%) as slightly unacceptable, 11 (3%) as slightly acceptable, 9 (2.5%) as moderately acceptable, 14 (3.9%) as highly acceptable, and 20 (5.5%) skipped the question. SEU faculty's attitude was perceived as 187 (51.7%) as highly unacceptable, 95 (26.2%) as moderately unacceptable, 27 (7.5%) as slightly unacceptable, 11 (3%) as slightly acceptable, 13 (3.3%) as moderately acceptable, 13 (3.3%) as highly acceptable, and 16 (4.4%) skipped the question. SEU staff's attitude was perceived as 164 (45.2%) as highly unacceptable, 88 (24.2%) as moderately unacceptable, 32 (8.8%) as slightly unacceptable, 15 (4.1%) as slightly acceptable, 11 (3%) as moderately acceptable, 13 (3.6%) as highly acceptable, and 40 (11%) skipped the question. SEU student's attitude was perceived as 85 (23.4%) as highly unacceptable, 108 (29.8%) as moderately unacceptable, 72 (19.8%) slightly unacceptable, 35 (9.6%) as slightly acceptable, 37 (10.2%) as moderately acceptable, 15 (4.1%) as acceptable, and 11 (3%) skipped the question.

Following this, the perceived treatment of students with SSA within the following SEU categories was gauged on the designated Likert scale: classrooms, athletics, student body

leadership counsel, clubs, chapel services, connect groups, and on-campus employment.

Perceived treatment of students with SSA in SEU classrooms was recorded as 95 (27.3%) seeing it as highly unacceptable, 64 (18.4%) as moderately unacceptable, 38 (10.9%) as slightly unacceptable, 35 (10.1%) as slightly acceptable, 34 (9.8%) as moderately acceptable, 23 (6.6%) as highly acceptable, and 59 (17%) skipped the question. SEU athletics' perceived treatment was 119 (26.2%) as highly unacceptable, 57 (16.4%) as moderately unacceptable, 25 (7.2%) as slightly unacceptable, 25 (6.4%) as slightly acceptable, 18 (5.2%) as moderately acceptable, 13 (3.7%) as highly acceptable, and 91 (26.1%) skipped the question. SEU student body leadership council's treatment was perceived as 121 (34.8%) as highly unacceptable, 60 (17.2%) as moderately unacceptable, 19 (5.5%) as slightly unacceptable, 25 (7.2%) as slightly acceptable, 20 (5.1%) as moderately acceptable, 19 (5.5%) as highly acceptable, and 84 (24.1%) skipped the question. SEU clubs' perceived treatment was perceived as 95 (27.4%) as highly unacceptable, 59 (17%) as moderately unacceptable, 37 (10.7%) as slightly unacceptable, 31 (8.9%) as slightly acceptable, 24 (6.9%) as moderately acceptable, 17 (4.9%) as highly acceptable, and 84 (24.2%) skipped the question. SEU chapel's perceived treatment was 127 (36.6%) as highly unacceptable, 53 (15.3%) as moderately unacceptable, 29 (8.4%) as slightly unacceptable, 26 (7.5%) as slightly acceptable, 24 (6.9%) as moderately acceptable, 26 (7.5%) as highly acceptable, and 62 (17.9%) skipped the question. SEU connect groups' perceived treatment was 98 (28.2%) as highly unacceptable, 53 (15.3%) as moderately unacceptable, 32 (9.2%) as slightly acceptable, 28 (8.1%) as slightly acceptable, 30 (8.6%) as moderately acceptable, 21 (6.1%) as highly acceptable, and 85 (24.5%) skipped the question. SEU on-campus employment's treatment as 95 (27.3%) as highly unacceptable, 60 (17.2%) as moderately unacceptable, 26

(7.5%) as slightly unacceptable, 29 (8.3%) as slightly acceptable, 27 (7.8%) as moderately acceptable, 19 (5.5%) as highly acceptable, and 92 (26.4%) skipped the question.

In light of the previously answered perceived attitudes and treatment of students with SSA on Southeastern University's campus, participants were then asked to gauge a final score on the designated Likert scale for their perceived *majority attitude* of campus climate concerning individuals with SSA. The following data was recorded for the perceived majority attitude: 115 (33%) as highly unacceptable, 126 (36.2%) as moderately unacceptable, 51 (14.7%) as slightly unacceptable, 34 (9.8%) as slightly acceptable, 20 (5.7%) as moderately acceptable, 2 (0.6%) as highly acceptable, and 44 (11.2%) skipped the question.

### **SSA Subpopulation Description**

A range of 25 to 30 participants answered specific demographic questions for the second half of the survey that was directed toward students who have SSA. Students who identified as having SSA showed a cumulative percent of 21.6%. Of this 21.6%, 12 participants (32.4%) described their degree of SSA as "strongly attracted", 10 (27%) as "moderately attracted", and 15 (40.5%) as "slightly attracted". Participants then gauged whether or not their SSA could be described as a "struggle" in their life with the following responses: never-9 (22%), rarely-11 (26.8%), occasionally-10 (24.3%), and frequently-11 (26.8%). Following, participants stated whether or not they were currently acting on their SSA; 6 (25%) answered "yes" and 18 (75%) answered "no". Of the subpopulation participants, 14 (51.3%) answered that they desire to change their SSA and 16 (58.7%) not desiring to change. Beginning of SSA feelings was documented as: elementary school-14 (45.2%), middle school-6 (19.4%), high school-6 (19.4%), and college-5 (16.1%). Emotional history saw 20 (73%) participants having a strained

relationship with their father, 11 (40.3%) having a strained relationship with their mother, 12 (44%) having been sexually abused and/or molested, and 2 (7.3%) having been neglected. The following demographic questions asked participants about their history with specific “life impacts” due in part or whole to SSA: thoughts of suicide-11 (40.3%), self-cutting-5 (18.3%), lack of self-esteem-19 (69.7%), secrecy-22 (80.7%), passivity-6 (22%), guilt/shame-20 (73.3%), rebelliousness-10 (36.7%), anxiety-16 (58.7%), anger-9 (33%), loneliness/isolation-20 (73.3%), abuse-2 (7.3%), eating disorder-2 (7.3%), and sleeping-10 (36.7%).

### **SSA SUBPOPULATION EXTENDED RESPONSES**

Throughout the second section of the survey, students who reported themselves as having SSA were given extended response questions alongside multiple choice questions as well as the option to comment on their multiple choice questions. When asked if there were any “identifiable ‘causes’” pertaining to their SSA, 1 (3.7%) replied the desire for acceptance, 1 (3.7%) suppression of sexuality at church, 1 (3.7%) molestation, 1 (3.7%) mother or father has SSA, 2 (7.3%) dating and/or falling in love with a person of the same sex, 2 (7.3%) pornography, 3 (11%) bullying, 4 (14.7%) lack of a same sex role model at home, 1 (3.7%) unsure of a cause, and 3 (11%) reported no cause/always there. Following the question “Do you desire to change your SSA?” respondents were allowed an extended response if they answered ‘yes;’ reported reasons were as follows: 1 (3.7%) “Don’t want to go to hell,” 1 (3.7%) “Don’t want to feel ‘this way’,” 1 (3.7%) “I feel ashamed,” 1 (3.7%) “Don’t want to be different,” and 3 (11%) “The Bible speaks against it/says I am an abomination.”

Participants were then asked if their SSA affected them in the following Christian practices/beliefs: prayer, confession, quiet time/personal study/Bible reading, participation in

small groups, witnessing, and church attendance. For prayer, 3.7% (1) stated that their prayer life was constant, 7.3% (2) that their prayer practice/belief was “somewhat” affected or that there was “little” change, 14.7% (4) that their prayer practice was stronger/they prayed more, 18.3% (5) that there was no affect, 3.7% (1) that they tried to “pray it away,” 3.7% (1) that they wish others would pray for them, 3.7% (1) that it both hurt and helped them, 3.7% (1) that they prayed for healing/deliverance, and 11% (3) that their prayer practice/belief made them feel remorseful/unworthy/dirty/in need of forgiveness. In terms of confession, 3.7% (1) stated that they were hesitant in this practice/belief, 3.7% (1) that they felt fear/rejection, 3.7% (1) that they were “holding back,” 3.7% (1) that they were lying during this practice/belief, 3.7% (1) that they felt guilt, 3.7% (1) that they were afraid to openly do this at SEU, 3.7% (1) that it “depends on the person,” 14.7% (4) that they confessed to “God alone,” 18.3% (5) that they actively practiced this belief, 7.3% (2) that they practiced confession in “other areas” other than SSA, and 14.7% (4) that their was no affect. For quiet time/personal study/Bible reading, 3.7% (1) of participants responded that they already know “what the Bible says” concerning SSA, 3.7% (1) that they feel “driven away,” 3.7% (1) that their SSA causes them to not be able to focus, 7.3% (2) that they were lacking in this practice/belief or didn’t take the time, 7.3% (2) that this area was a struggle for them, 3.7% (1) that they felt convicted during this practice/belief, 14.7% (4) that their SSA caused them to become more active in this area, and 22% (6) that there was no affect in this practice/belief from SSA. When it came to participation in small groups, 18.3% (5) of participants reported that they feel they “hold back” in this practice/belief due to their SSA, 3.7% (1) that is practice/belief made them nervous because of their SSA, 3.7% (1) that they “don’t belong” when they are participating in this practice/belief, 3.7% (1) that they felt they could not get “too personal,” 7.3% (2) that they were actively involved, and 29.3% that their SSA had no

affect on this practice/belief. As for the practice/belief of witnessing, 11% (3) of participants responded that they felt they were “not good enough”/were ashamed/felt hypocritical, 3.7% (1) that they only practiced this belief at home, 3.7% (1) that they felt they “helped some and confused others,” 11% (3) that their SSA made this practice “better with others who also have SSA,” 3.7% (1) that it was a struggle, 3.7% (1) that they felt suppressed, 3.7% (1) that they “haven’t done it lately,” and 22% that their SSA had no affect on this practice/belief. Finally in terms of church attendance, 3.7% (1) of participants responded that they “feel afraid” during this practice/belief, 3.7% (1) that they “feel dirty,” 3.7% (1) that they frequently attend but are not an “active participant,” 3.7% (1) that they feel “church is not a home,” 3.7% (1) that they practice this minimally, 11% (3) that they “still go,” and 29.3% (8) that this practice/belief was not affected by their SSA.

Following this, participants were then asked where they feel the “most acceptance” at SEU and the “least acceptance” concerning their SSA. In regards to where and/or from whom they feel the “most acceptance” at SEU, 18.3% (5) participants responded that “no one knows” or that they “keep it a secret,” 7.3% (2) stated “no where,” 3.7% (1) “outside” of SEU, 7.3% (2) with their roommates, 18.3% (5) with “a few friends,” 3.7% (1) with “others who have SSA,” 3.7% (1) with students, 14.7% (4) at various school departments/clubs/forums, 3.7% (1) that they “don’t need it,” and 3.7% (1) only from God. Concerning “least acceptance,” 22% (6) of participants responded “everywhere,” 11% (3) from the “majority of campus” and/or campus affiliated beliefs/rules, 3.7% (1) with students, 7.3% (2) with professors, 7.3% (2) with faculty/administration, 3.7% (1) specific departments on campus, and 3.7% from “outside” of the SEU campus.

Finally, participants of the subpopulation group were asked how SEU has ministered to them concerning their SSA and how the university could further help students who have SSA. Concerning how SEU has ministered specifically to students with SSA, 44% of participants (12) stated that “they (SEU) haven’t”, while 11% (3) mentioned an atmosphere of intolerance, 3.7% (1) that there were no available support systems that they were aware of, 7.3% (2) that “it’s not talked about”, and 3.7% (1) that they sought campus counseling. In terms of how SEU can further minister to students with SSA, 47.7% (13) of participants stated that the campus needs to be “better educated” on the issue in order to erase stigmas and negative attitudes regarding this topic and “create more awareness”, while 22% of participants expressed the desire for an anonymous program or support group that could offer spiritual guidance for these students. Other responses for this question included: 7.3% (2) that there should be a designated chapel to offer more information on this topic, 3.7% (1) that there should be an anonymous reporting system for roommates, 7.3% (2) that the campus needs to be “more open” about the subject, 11% (3) that there needs to be a re-evaluation of “consequences” for students who are found to have SSA, and 3.7% (1) that SEU should allow students who are “not practicing” to be in leadership positions.



## FINDINGS

### General Campus Climate

The purpose of this survey was to determine what the current perception of Southeastern University's campus climate concerning individuals with SSA was through the eyes of the student population. After analyzing the results, the consensus can be made that students perceive the *majority attitude* of the SEU campus to be "moderately unacceptable" toward students who have SSA. Students overwhelmingly described administration, faculty, and staff as displaying a "highly unacceptable" attitude toward individuals with SSA, while students were described as having a "moderately unacceptable" attitude. The same was identified for the treatment of individuals with SSA within various Southeastern categories with "highly unacceptable" marking the majority consensus of all categories. Demographics were reflective of the schools population with the majority being white, heterosexual, and with a strong Christian background. Thus, the perceptions shared by the student body can be seen as an accurate portrayal of how students view the attitude toward and treatment of students with SSA at SEU. While this may be a reflection of the university's affiliation with the Assemblies of God, further discussion on this topic will be detailed under "Recommendations."

### Subpopulation Perceptions

Students who identify with having SSA voiced a devastatingly negative perception of the SEU campus climate in all areas of attitude and treatment. The majority stated that they feel isolated, fearful, and unwanted among administration, faculty, staff, and students. Many suffer from broken pasts including strained relationships with parents, sexual abuse, thoughts of suicide, lack of self-esteem, as well as feelings of guilt/shame and loneliness/isolation. The

subpopulation stated that they feel that they feel the “most acceptance” among a few close friends, but that on campus they kept their feelings of SSA a secret. They also voiced that they feel the “least acceptance” from the majority of campus. When it came to how SEU has ministered to them during their time thus far at the university, the subpopulation expressed that “they haven’t” been ministered to and/or they are unaware of any specific opportunities for students with SSA. However, when it came to how SEU can further help students with SSA, the subpopulation was very adamant about better educating and creating awareness on campus, desiring an anonymous support program or group, and reevaluating the “consequences” of students found to have SSA at SEU.

## DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

### Denominational Affiliation

From its creation, Southeastern University has always been affiliated with the Assemblies of God denomination. Thus, the denominational standing of this group greatly affects the majority attitude perceived at SEU. According to the 2001 revision of the Assemblies of God General Presbytery statement of faith concerning homosexuality (General Council of the Assemblies of God), “homosexual behavior is sin” (1) because it goes against scriptural teachings (1), “because it is contrary to God’s created order for the family and human relationships” (2), and, like all other sin, comes under divine judgment (2). However, “homosexual behavior is sin for which reconciliation is possible” (3) by genuine repentance through the blood of Jesus Christ which reconciles all sinners.

In all these respects, SEU’s perceived attitude lines up with these statements of faith. However, an area that appears to be lacking falls under the statement of faith concerning homosexuality’s third section “A Word to the Church” (4). In this section, the General Council of the Assemblies of God states that, “believers who struggle with homosexual temptations must be *encouraged* and *strengthened* by fellow Christians” (4). As the subpopulation voiced, they feel that they are not being ministered too, that their struggles are shunned, and that revealing their SSA would get them into severe trouble with administration. Thus, I suggest the following recommendations to SEU that would further assist in ministering to individuals with SSA: (1) reevaluate existing policies concerning SSA and the “consequences” involved, (2) better educating the campus to create awareness and erase preconceived stigmas and attitudes, and (3) developing an anonymous support program or group for students with SSA.

**Reevaluating Existing Policies**

*“Where do you find the LEAST acceptance of your SSA at Southeastern University?”*

*-“On campus it is in the handbook as against the rules.”*

The Southeastern University 2012/2013 Student Handbook states under the heading “Social Life” that the “SEU community is one that recognizes the need for behavior that aligns with Scripture and is committed to maintaining a culture that honors Christ” (5). Thus, under the subsection of “Sexual Misconduct” the following criterion is applied, “Prohibited behavior to be avoided by all members of the community includes...homosexual behavior...” (6). Therefore, the SEU student handbook is adequately in line with the official Assemblies of God statement of faith. However, if such an offense is committed, the student(s) involved are charged with a Level Two Infraction. Sanctions to be determined by the judicial body for this level of code violation includes: warning, probation, loss of privileges, fines, restitution, discretionary sanctions, other sanctions, and university suspension (11). The problem arises with the “other sanctions” which includes mandated counseling or therapy (11).

Many participants in the subpopulation of this study mentioned in the extended responses that they feared asking for help with their SSA because they knew they would be “forced” into counseling/therapy. Some even went so far as to mention that they knew of others who had “come-out,” were sanctioned to mandated counseling/therapy, and had undergone dramatic therapy procedures that caused them to become resentful towards the university and/or its administration. At this point, I would like to recommend that if students are fearful of the “consequences” of asking for help, then it may be time to reexamine the disciplinary procedures that accompany this “infraction”. Is it possible that this “restorative process” (7) is too harsh?

Understanding that the university's "Philosophy of Discipline" involves "procedures designed to promote fundamental fairness" (7), is it possible that those seeking help with their SSA might be being confused with those who are *acting* on their SSA?

Thus, it may be time that SEU reexamine and reevaluate the existing policies concerning SSA. I am not suggesting that this conservative, Assemblies of God affiliated university become liberal and allow homosexual behavior. However, I am proposing that in order to clarify existing confusion regarding those who have SSA but are not acting on it, SEU may want to add a new section to the Student Handbook that addresses this topic. This new section would address the university's stance on the topic, the reasoning behind this position, and specifying that SEU does not seek to reprimand those who are struggling with SSA tendencies, but is obligated to enforce discipline on those who act against sexual misconduct guidelines. An adequate statement might read as such: Southeastern University does not allow the *practice* of homosexual relationships for any member of their community, but we do acknowledge the existence of individuals with same-sex attraction (SSA) and their equal right to the love and forgiveness of God through Jesus Christ. I believe by appropriately addressing this controversial and negatively perceived topic, SEU will be able to preserve the beliefs of the university while still extending reasonable protocols regarding social life and sexual misconduct of their community.

### **Better Educating the Campus**

*"How can Southeastern University further help individuals with SSA on campus?"*

*- "I'm not as concerned with being helped. I'd rather the stigma be helped. Most Christians that struggle with it are not disagreeing that it's a sin. It is. But there is no real love for people who step forward. I wish Southeastern would teach people how to love and fully*

*embrace people who struggle with this the same as they would surely not abandon someone who struggles with pride or arrogance.”*

Due to the denominational affiliation and the common Christian stigmas involving the topic of homosexuality, Southeastern University is perceived as moderately unacceptable towards those with SSA. However, preconceived notions and stereotypes should not be the one thing standing in the way of SEU being able to effectively minister to this neglected group of students. The SEU Student Handbook lists “Be open to change” under the ‘Southeastern Values’ with the description that “If we don’t like change, we’re going to like irrelevance even less” (5). I believe that SEU must address the topic of SSA openly among their student body due to the growing prevalence and influence it has already had in the present world. If SEU fails to discuss this topic with their students and better educate their campus on SSA, then they will quickly become stagnant to a people group that lives closer to them than they think and is radically growing throughout the nation.

In order to better educate the SEU campus and create awareness of SSA, I suggest that the university (1) highly consider placing a statement of university beliefs in the student handbook, as discussed in the previous section, and (2) hold a chapel service to discuss this controversial topic. One of SEU’s most popular chapel services is their “Ask Anything Chapel” where students are allowed to text in their questions concerning their faith, walk with God, etc. and have faculty/staff answer them. I believe it would be beneficial if SEU held a similar chapel service that discussed what the Bible has to say about homosexuality, why it is still relevant today, and what the university believes in order to clarify to the student body the Biblical stance on this controversial topic. Then, I would open the floor to questions via open-microphone and/or anonymous text so students can ask their questions regarding homosexuality/SSA.

Through this method, the student body would be better informed as to what the university believes, why they believe it, and how that relates to the treatment of students with SSA on campus by both administration/faculty/staff and students. This method would also relieve the pressure that many of the subpopulation feels to hide their struggle with SSA and would, hopefully, allow them to feel accepted on campus as just another student who wrestles with sin, but is devotedly seeking God with their heart, mind, and soul.

A note should be made, however, that this process might take time to become effective on campus. It is impossible to change the stereotypes, stigmas, and preconceived attitudes established and conceded by the Church for hundreds of years in one day. Nevertheless, the importance of addressing this issue is found in the conversations that will stem from publicly discussing homosexuality/SSA at a conservative, Assemblies of God university. Once the university expresses their opinions and intentions concerning this topic to the campus, discourse will surely follow among the students of the university. They will seek the advice and opinions of various administrators and professors, which will in turn stimulate discussion among their peers. Once the university has finally unmasked this “forbidden topic”, time will influence change, just as one drop in the middle of a pond sends out hundreds of ripples.

### **Developing a Support Program/Group for Students with SSA**

*“How can Southeastern University further help students with SSA on campus?”*

- *“Create ways for students with SSA to talk to spiritual leaders without it being awkward or facing a threat of getting in trouble. I honestly feel as if I might get expelled from here if someone found out. Or everyone would just hate me.”*

While Southeastern does offer available assistance to students who have SSA, the current aid attainable for these individuals is difficult to access and shrouded in rumors. Though it may seem easy for a student to simply contact Student Services and request aid, the negative stigmas associated with this topic hinders those with SSA from freely being able to seek help. Presently, students with SSA feel that their struggles are suppose to be “done away with” or that they will be “ostracized and condemned for the remainder of (their) college career” if they make their struggles known. This fear can be reduced through the previously mentioned suggestions for Southeastern University, but I would also like to offer a third and final suggestion. I believe it would greatly benefit students with SSA at SEU to have an available anonymous support program/group that would both counsel and disciple these students through their struggles.

Presently, the only available aid for students with SSA is one-on-one counseling, however, many feel that this method is intimidating and does not offer them the support system that they hope for. Therefore, an anonymous support program/group would allow for students with SSA to meet with spiritual leaders on campus who can offer them encouragement and guidance pertaining to their situation as well as support from other students struggling in the same way. The group atmosphere would be able to elevate the self-esteem of many of these students by creating a place that they feel accepted and are not condemned for their struggles. It would also allow students to see that they do not struggle with this sin on their own, but that they can learn from and hold one another accountable in their walk with Christ.

The main focus of this support program/group is not only to assist in creating a “safe place” for these students, but also providing access to spiritual leaders who can guide them in their individual walks with Christ. It would most likely be best to have the program/group led by a co-ed team so students will have a gender specific leader to communicate with. Leaders could



also rely on a curriculum with a bible study format that also utilizes counseling techniques. This way the students are first being ministered to spiritually and in the process also being given therapy assistance. However, it is important to note that this support program/group is not focused on “change” therapy, but is should be designed to provide support, prayer, and guidance tailor for the specific struggles faced by students with SSA.

Another important aspect of this support program/group is the necessity that it remains anonymous to ensure the privacy of participants. As many of the subpopulation mentioned, they keep this specific struggle to themselves due to the negative stigmas on campus toward SSA. Therefore, in order to allow students to feel safe in this support program/group it is imperative that all who desire to participate sign confidentiality forms. These forms would be similar to those given out in professional therapy sessions that ensure that the information shared in each session is confidential along with the fact that their participation in the group can neither be confirmed nor denied by both the leaders and fellow participants. This aspect of the support program/group needs to be taken with the utmost seriousness to ensure that students feel that the environment of this group is designed to protect them and to provide a secure atmosphere where they can share their struggles openly.

Finally, it is extremely important that this support group/program is also *optional* for all participants. Many of the subpopulation expressed that they keep their struggles private because they fear the mandatory counseling/therapy that they would be “forced” into if administration/faculty found out they have SSA. When students feel that they are being “forced” into something their fight-or-flight impulse kicks in causing one of two reactions: (1) they become resistance to the system and rebel against protocols, or (2) they conceal their struggles and hide in order to protect themselves. In order to erase both of these extremes, ensuring that

the support program/group is optional will allow students to feel that their participation is truly for their personal benefit. It is their choice to better themselves and to seek guidance, rather than feeling that the university is imposing change on them. In this way, I believe that participation will rise dramatically as students realize that the school does not condone their sin, but is available to offer them support and guidance as they learn to submit to the Lord and follow his Word.

### **Weaknesses of Study**

The weaknesses of the current study involve the format of the survey and the use of the university's Survey Monkey account. The format of the survey was found to be confusing for some students who did not realize that the second portion of the survey was designated only for students with SSA. There were a few cases of students who did not identify in this way who answered in the second half of the survey causing some results to be skewed. While we attempted to fix this problem by weeding out the results before drawing conclusions, some incorrect answers may have been overlooked. The format of the survey was also very broad in its approach. While this did provide students with the space to provide qualitative data, it was difficult to calculate specific quantitative data with significant impact. In order for those reading this study to fully understand the needs of these students, they would need to read the specific answers of each participant in the second half of the survey. Finally, the use of SEU's Survey Monkey account was not used correctly and the identity of students were subject to be compromised if they fell into the wrong hands. The survey was sent out via SEU email, but if the students clicked on the personalized link to participate, their results were saved under their name. Upon realizing this, all data pertaining to specific identification of students was destroyed to

ensure the confidentiality of results. However, this caused confusion between faculty and myself and unneeded stress involving the authenticity of my study and the security of its participants.

### **Further Research**

Further research concerning not only students at SEU with SSA, but also all Christian universities is greatly needed. It would be beneficial if all universities under the leadership of the Christian Council of Christian Universities (CCCU) would participate in a similar study to evaluate the campus climates towards individuals with SSA at each school. This way the universities can be compared to find which has excelled in this area and which are in need of assistance in developing a better approach to this topic. This study would also bring awareness to the administration of the CCCU and the universities toward the need to better educate their campuses concerning SSA in order to erase denomination stigmas and cultural attitudes. Once a support program/group has been formed at several of these CCCU universities, it would also be beneficial to do a study involving the success of these programs and what format has served to minister the best to the SSA subpopulation on these campuses. Through this study a master program can be developed for all universities through the CCCU to ensure that all students struggling with SSA are being aided in the same way across the nation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I believe that this study has served to bring light to a topic that is often surrounded by anger, hostility, and fear in the Christian world. Through this study the voice of students with SSA at a Christian university have been heard and the need to minister to them has been made evident. Now it is up to the university to take the information and suggestions from this study and put them into action. If this subpopulation continues to be ignored, the negative stigmas and attitudes of Christians toward SSA will only increase and force these students to feel isolated, unwanted, and unloved by the very group of people who were commanded by their Lord to “love their neighbor as themselves.” It is up to the university to minister to this subpopulation on their campus and reach out to them in a way that does not feel forced or insincere. With the prevalence of same-sex attraction and homosexuality continuing to rise in the culture of the world today, it is up to Christians to speak up in a loving way that does not condone the sin of individuals with SSA, but shows them the truth of God’s love and personifying it in their actions toward ministering to this people group. If Christians do not step up and speak out in an effective manner then our voices will be lost among the numerous others spewing hatred upon those with SSA. My parting words for you come from 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (ESV) “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” Therefore, let us love one another as Christians by reaching out to those among us who struggle with SSA, and by ministering to them we can then begin to impact the culture around us

by raising up leaders who know the truth of God's Word concerning this topic and who can effectively witness to this people group within our own nation and the rest of the world.

**APPENDIX OF RESULTS TABLES**

**Tables Concerning Demographics**

**Sexual Orientation**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Heterosexual	358	91.3	93.0	93.0
Homosexual-practicing	9	2.3	2.3	95.3
Homosexual-not practicing	2	.5	.5	95.8
Bisexual-practicing	2	.5	.5	96.4
Bisexual-not practicing	14	3.6	3.6	100.0
Total	385	98.2	100.0	
Missing System	7	1.8		
Total	392	100.0		

**Home Church Denominational Standing \* Personal Attitude Regarding SSA**

**Crosstab**

Count

		Personal Attitude Regarding SSA		
		Highly Unacceptable	Moderately Unacceptable	Slightly Unacceptable
Home Church Denominational Standing	Catholic	1	0	0
	Baptist	22	6	1
	Southern Baptist	10	9	2
	Pentecostal	23	10	5

	Assemblies of God	68	31	9
	Presbyterian	3	2	1
	Lutheran	1	0	0
	Methodist	5	2	1
	Church of God	2	1	1
	None	15	9	6
	Non-Denominational	12	8	6
	Other	17	2	3
Total		179	80	35

**Crosstab**

Count

		Personal Attitude Regarding SSA		
		Slightly Acceptable	Moderately Acceptable	Higly Acceptable
Home Church Denominational Standing	Catholic	1	0	1
	Baptist	1	4	1
	Southern Baptist	2	0	1
	Pentecostal	1	0	4
	Assemblies of God	8	10	12
	Presbyterian	4	1	1
	Lutheran	0	0	0
	Methodist	1	4	3

	Church of God	1	3	0
	None	5	1	6
	Non-Denominational	0	2	1
	Other	1	3	1
Total		25	28	31

**Crosstab**

Count

		Total
Home Church Denominational Standing	Catholic	3
	Baptist	35
	Southern Baptist	24
	Pentecostal	43
	Assemblies of God	138
	Presbyterian	12
	Lutheran	1
	Methodist	16
	Church of God	8
	None	42
	Non-Denominational	29
Other	27	
Total		378



**Tables Concerning Frequencies of Campus Climate-Attitudes**

**SEU Attitudes-Adminstration**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0	20	5.1	5.5	5.5
	Highly Unacceptable	225	57.4	62.0	67.5
	Moderately Unacceptable	70	17.9	19.3	86.8
Valid	Slightly Unacceptable	14	3.6	3.9	90.6
	Slightly Acceptable	11	2.8	3.0	93.7
	Moderately Acceptable	9	2.3	2.5	96.1
	Highly Acceptable	14	3.6	3.9	100.0
	Total	363	92.6	100.0	
Missing	System	29	7.4		
	Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Attitudes-Faculty**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	16	4.1	4.4	4.4
	Highly Unacceptable	187	47.7	51.7	56.1
	Moderately Unacceptable	95	24.2	26.2	82.3
	Slightly Unacceptable	27	6.9	7.5	89.8
	Slightly Acceptable	11	2.8	3.0	92.8

	Moderately Acceptable	13	3.3	3.6	96.4
	Highly Acceptable	13	3.3	3.6	100.0
	Total	362	92.3	100.0	
Missing	System	30	7.7		
	Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Attitudes-Staff**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0	40	10.2	11.0	11.0
	Highly Unacceptable	164	41.8	45.2	56.2
	Moderately Unacceptable	88	22.4	24.2	80.4
Valid	Slightly Unacceptable	32	8.2	8.8	89.3
	Slightly Acceptable	15	3.8	4.1	93.4
	Moderately Acceptable	11	2.8	3.0	96.4
	Highly Acceptable	13	3.3	3.6	100.0
	Total	363	92.6	100.0	
Missing	System	29	7.4		
	Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Attitudes-Students**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0	11	2.8	3.0	3.0
	Highly Unacceptable	85	21.7	23.4	26.4
	Moderately Unacceptable	108	27.6	29.8	56.2
Valid	Slightly Unacceptable	72	18.4	19.8	76.0
	Slightly Acceptable	35	8.9	9.6	85.7
	Moderately Acceptable	37	9.4	10.2	95.9
	Highly Acceptable	15	3.8	4.1	100.0
	Total	363	92.6	100.0	
Missing	System	29	7.4		
	Total	392	100.0		

**Tables Concerning Frequencies of Campus Climate-Treatment**

**SEU Treatment-Classroom**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	59	15.1	17.0	17.0
	Highly Unacceptable	95	24.2	27.3	44.3
	Moderately Unacceptable	64	16.3	18.4	62.6
	Slightly Unacceptable	38	9.7	10.9	73.6
	Slightly Acceptable	35	8.9	10.1	83.6
	Moderately Acceptable	34	8.7	9.8	93.4
	Highly Acceptable	23	5.9	6.6	100.0

	Total	348	88.8	100.0	
Missing	System	44	11.2		
	Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Treatment-Athletics**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0	91	23.2	26.1	26.1
	Highly Unacceptable	119	30.4	34.2	60.3
	Moderately Unacceptable	57	14.5	16.4	76.7
Valid	Slightly Unacceptable	25	6.4	7.2	83.9
	Slightly Acceptable	25	6.4	7.2	91.1
	Moderately Acceptable	18	4.6	5.2	96.3
	Highly Acceptable	13	3.3	3.7	100.0
	Total	348	88.8	100.0	
Missing	System	44	11.2		
	Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Treatment-Student Body Leadership Council**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	0	84	21.4	24.1	24.1

	Highly Unacceptable	121	30.9	34.8	58.9
	Moderately Unacceptable	60	15.3	17.2	76.1
	Slightly Unacceptable	19	4.8	5.5	81.6
	Slightly Acceptable	25	6.4	7.2	88.8
	Moderately Acceptable	20	5.1	5.7	94.5
	Highly Acceptable	19	4.8	5.5	100.0
	Total	348	88.8	100.0	
Missing	System	44	11.2		
	Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Treatment-Clubs**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0	84	21.4	24.2	24.2
	Highly Unacceptable	95	24.2	27.4	51.6
	Moderately Unacceptable	59	15.1	17.0	68.6
Valid	Slightly Unacceptable	37	9.4	10.7	79.3
	Slightly Acceptable	31	7.9	8.9	88.2
	Moderately Acceptable	24	6.1	6.9	95.1
	Highly Acceptable	17	4.3	4.9	100.0
	Total	347	88.5	100.0	
Missing	System	45	11.5		

Total	392	100.0		
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**SEU Treatment-Chapel**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	62	15.8	17.9	17.9
Highly Unacceptable	127	32.4	36.6	54.5
Moderately Unacceptable	53	13.5	15.3	69.7
Slightly Unacceptable	29	7.4	8.4	78.1
Slightly Acceptable	26	6.6	7.5	85.6
Moderately Acceptable	24	6.1	6.9	92.5
Highly Acceptable	26	6.6	7.5	100.0
Total	347	88.5	100.0	
Missing System	45	11.5		
Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Treatment-Connect Groups**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 0	85	21.7	24.5	24.5
Highly Acceptable	98	25.0	28.2	52.7

	Moderately Acceptable	53	13.5	15.3	68.0
	Slightly Acceptable	32	8.2	9.2	77.2
	Slightly Acceptable	28	7.1	8.1	85.3
	Moderately Acceptable	30	7.7	8.6	93.9
	Highly Acceptable	21	5.4	6.1	100.0
	Total	347	88.5	100.0	
Missing	System	45	11.5		
	Total	392	100.0		

**SEU Treatment-On Campus Employment**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	0	92	23.5	26.4	26.4
	Highly Unacceptable	95	24.2	27.3	53.7
	Moderately Unacceptable	60	15.3	17.2	71.0
Valid	Slightly Unacceptable	26	6.6	7.5	78.4
	Slightly Acceptable	29	7.4	8.3	86.8
	Moderately Acceptable	27	6.9	7.8	94.5
	Highly Acceptable	19	4.8	5.5	100.0
	Total	348	88.8	100.0	
Missing	System	44	11.2		

Total	392	100.0		
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**SEU Majority Attitude Regarding SSA**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid				
Highly Unacceptable	115	29.3	33.0	33.0
Moderately Unacceptable	126	32.1	36.2	69.3
Slightly Unacceptable	51	13.0	14.7	83.9
Slightly Acceptable	34	8.7	9.8	93.7
Moderately Acceptable	20	5.1	5.7	99.4
Highly Acceptable	2	.5	.6	100.0
Total	348	88.8	100.0	
Missing				
System	44	11.2		
Total	392	100.0		



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