Illinois State University
ISU ReD: Research and eData

Theses and Dissertations

6-5-2013

The Essential Value of LGBT Resource Centers

Matthew Raymond Damschroder
Illinois State University, damschroder@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: http://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/etd

Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons, and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Damschroder, Matthew Raymond, "The Essential Value of LGBT Resource Centers" (2013). *Theses and Dissertations.* Paper 446.

THE ESSENTIAL VALUE OF LGBT RESOURCE CENTERS

Matthew R. Damschroder

464 Pages

Through the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ students on three campuses, this study provides evidence of the essential value of LGBT Centers as they advocate for and empower LGBTQ+ students. Grounded in theories of college student development, identity development, and Queer theory, the qualitative study draws on 35 semi-structured interviews with students and staff involved with LGBT Centers on three campuses that broadly reflect the diversity of higher education in the United States. In particular, the study answers the following questions: What are historical and current contexts of LGBT Centers? What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students? Who are the Centers for and what purposes do they serve? What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity?

The study explores campus climate for LGBTQ+ students, and campus spaces that reflect inclusionary and exclusionary practices. Participants' experiences of microaggressions and their perceptions of critical counterspaces are described. The study further describes the policies, programs, services and daily practices that embody the

value that Centers contribute to campuses. Serving multiple simultaneous and congruent purposes on campus, the data revealed that Center activities fall into two themes: those that primarily support core institutional practices of instruction, education, learning and research: advocacy, ally development, fostering visibility, and assessment; and those that primarily further individual student outcomes: community and counterspace, specialized expertise, advising, leadership development, and providing information, referral and resources.

Beyond those activities specifically related to LGBTQ+ identity and the support of those marginalized based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Centers contribute significantly to the development of capacities and skills in students that transcend identity work and development. In particular, participants discussed ways that Center participation fostered professionalism and the ability to work with others in productivity environments. Participants also explored the development of resilience, or strategies that they employ to overcome obstacles to their achievement of desired goals and outcomes. Finally, participants discussed the ways Center involvement cultivated a social justice lens, which participants used to buffer, interpret and understand encounters and interactions with other individuals and experiences of the world.

Finally, the study provides additional observations, conclusions and recommendations for future inquiry. Asserting that future Center efforts must coalesce around emerging sexual and gender identity understandings to maintain Center value, purpose and relevance, the author calls on researchers to consider the ways that Centers can and do broaden their influence and impact beyond active users or students whose primary identity development trajectory relates to sexual identity or gender identity. The

study also challenges that identity alone may be a less valuable unit of analysis in parsing and understanding participants, their experiences and contributions to research.

THE ESSENTIAL VALUE OF LGBT RESOURCE CENTERS

MATTHEW R. DAMSCHRODER

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2015

THE ESSENTIAL VALUE OF LGBT RESOURCE CENTERS

MATTHEW R. DAMSCHRODER

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Phyllis McCluskey-Titus, Chair

Beth Hatt

Pamela Hoff

Karla Carney-Hall

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

i

know is necessary for full social participation of those marginalized by sexual and gender identity.

I'm grateful for the incredible faculty in my doctoral department, Educational Administration and Foundations, for their energies and kind attentions on my behalf. My experiences as a Redbird have been personally and professionally formative in ways I'm sure I will never fully grasp, and the influence and impact of these incredible minds will continue to flow through me as I go out in the world and apply my knowledge. Finally, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the amazing students and colleagues on my home campus, Illinois Wesleyan University, who have given me opportunities to serve and practice, to grow my skills, and to apply my coursework. I love my Titans, I adore this alma mater, and I celebrate #TGOE!

On a more personal note my parents Bruce and Deanne raised me with critical values, shaping me to value education and lifelong learning. There was no greater gift that I've received than a love of reading and writing and thinking. I'm also thankful for all the friends and family who have provided support and encouragement to me in this process. Darcy and Sandi, in particular, have been with me on every step of this journey.

I am humble and grateful for all of these incredible connections and influences. I hope to spend the rest of my life paying forward the educational opportunity that I've been afforded.

<div align="right">M.R.D.</div>

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

Institutions of higher education have existed in the United States for nearly 400 years, but calls for the inclusion of racial minorities and students from other underrepresented groups, such as those associated with faith, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, have only been seen in more recent decades. In part due to the expansion of higher education following World War II, Civil Rights victories that promoted access to public institutions for people marginalized by race or other identities, and a growing critical consciousness on the part of people within institutions, the climate for underrepresented students has continued to improve (Thelin, 2004).

However, access alone has not been sufficient to counter obstacles to marginalized student persistence and success. Under-represented students have been confronted with institutions shaped to meet the needs of the majority, without taking into account the unique experiences and needs of diverse others. Under-represented students have struggled to find themselves, their cultures and their interests reflected in the curriculum, in campus traditions, and in campus spaces. In addition, they have encountered active and passive resistance to their presence from peers, faculty and administrators who have not bought into arguments or means that have facilitated their inclusion (Thelin, 2004).

Institutions have attempted to support underrepresented students in a variety of ways: through recruitment of critical masses of marginalized students that can establish and maintain minority cohorts on campus, by recruitment of faculty and staff who share marginalized student identity characteristics, and by the provision of student development programs and personnel dedicated to the retention and support of marginalized students. Students themselves have demanded supports that provided meaning and value to them, such as academic programs that explore diverse peoples' history and culture, funding for clubs and organizations that explore and celebrate their history and culture, campus events that bring prominent scholars with diverse backgrounds to speak on the campus, and campus spaces where marginalized students and supportive others may gather together to build community and engage with one another. These diverse implementations of campus spaces that support marginalized students have come to embody the broadest understanding of culture centers.

Today's culture centers are as diverse as the students they support, representing identities grounded in race, gender, faith, sexual orientation, and/or the intersections of otherness. Each center is a product of its history and circumstances, and each has a unique mission and purposes. Scholarship exists to provide evidence for claims that centers grounded in racial identity: create a space of sanctuary and facilitate belonging for underrepresented groups on campus (Lozano, 2010; Shotten, Yellowfish & Cintron, 2010), encourage student involvement (Liu, Cuyjet & Lee, 2010; Patton, 2010), engage in critical advocacy (Patton, 2011; Renn, 2011), and provide students with essential tools and strategies for navigating through microaggressions and other obstacles implicit in an underrepresented status (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solorzano, 2009).

However, relatively little work has been done comparatively in relation to the outcomes of centers grounded in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and other non-normative sexual and gender identities, and even less work exists on intersections between sexual and gender identity and other salient identity characteristics, such as race. There is important scholarly work to be done mapping Center activities to Center purposes, and seeking evidence that validates claims that are made about efficacy. The past several decades have witnessed a rising tide of educational accountability at the institutional level. Expectations exist among educational stakeholders that educational claims made by institutions regarding the value of the curriculum and the learning of students be accompanied by evidence that supports them (Bers & Swing, 2010). Claiming that students are learning is considerably different than providing evidence to that effect (Suskie, 2009). This shift, brought about by pressure from accreditors, governing boards, legislatures, students and parents, and educators themselves, has resulted in a considerable increase in the ways that institutions measure how and what students are learning, as well as other factors that are related to the educational environment (Bers & Swing, 2010).

At the level of student affairs, major publications in the literature of student development, such as the Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1996) and *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004) have called upon practitioners to create intentional linkages between student learning that takes place inside the classroom, and that which takes place in co-curricular contexts. "Wherever student learning and development are supposed to happen, there should be goals for that learning, and assessments to see how well students are achieving those goals" (Suskie, 2009, p. 9).

LGBT Center missions commonly suggest activities intended to advocate for and empower LGBTQ+ students, to facilitate their campus involvement and leadership skills, to support their identity development, and provide a safe space where skills and strategies can be cultivated to help students overcome obstacles and barriers to their success. Yet few studies have been conducted to provide evidence of outcomes or to investigate how the activities of centers bridge the gap between intentions and outcomes. The research field is wide open in exploration of the value and meaning of LGBT culture centers in the context of their institutional homes. In considering how centers contribute to the campus, a researcher or Center observer may be left to wonder:

What are historical and current contexts of the LGBT Centers? What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students? Who are the centers for and what purposes do they serve? What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity?

The final questions are, in some ways, most interesting and critical to the survival of LGBT Centers in a context of increasingly scarce resources and the perception of growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. Providing evidence that centers contribute in meaningful ways to the core mission of the institution could sustain some centers through future periods of economic challenge and institutional contraction.

Statement of the Problem

The climate of a campus for LGBTQ+ persons plays a significant role in an LGBTQ+ individual's ability to be successful. The following section provides a

description of campus climate and the literature that links LGBTQ+ identify development with campus climate. It then describes the historical conditions that have warranted the creation of campus centers in support of LGBTQ+ students. Finally, a discussion is offered of the need for evidence that supports the efficacy of LGBT Centers in meeting their stated outcomes.

Campus Climate

Institutional culture and climate are inextricably linked. The culture of a campus refers to the fundamental assumptions that guide patterns of behavior, determine sites of participation and modes of interaction, and are represented in the symbols, stories and artifacts one encounters on the campus (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Campus climate is the way that a person experiences the institution's culture (Peterson & Spencer, 2000). Much in the way that institutions retain students while at the same time students persist to graduation, institutions have cultures while at the same time students experience climates. As the student arrives on campus as his or her full authentic self, including all aspects of his or her developing character and identity, intellectual abilities and potentials, interests, passions and unique qualities of personhood, the culture and climate of an institution provide places of immediate and strong connection, and spaces of challenge and strong disconnection. For some students, the latter is provided in greater proportion to the prior.

In particular, students who differ from the social norms—such as those who represent racial minorities, are non-heteronormative, celebrate underrepresented faith traditions, or live with disabilities, to provide a few examples—may experience more obstacles to full inclusion and participation on campus. LGBTQ+ students, for example, may encounter attitudes, behavior and cultural assumptions that diminish or deride their

5

fundamental self-understandings. They may be harassed emotionally and physically.

They may experience intentional and unintentional microaggressions. They may be told

in a number of ways that who they are is unwelcome, unsafe or unvalued (Nadal, Issa,

Leon, Meterko, Wideman, & Wong, 2011). Exploring and attending to the campus

climate for marginalized members is critical practice for institutions that seek to create

fully inclusive cultures supportive of student learning and development.

All the more important because Broido (2004) describes a series of social and

cultural trends that are resulting in a changing composite student body on the college

campuses of the United States. Unlike past cohorts, racial diversity among Millennials

will increase dramatically, but their schooling and neighborhood experiences will reflect

more homogeneity: "'Children of all groups are being raised in environments where their

own groups' size is inflated, and where they are under-exposed to children of other racial

and ethnic backgrounds (p. 1)' (Logan et al., 2001)" (p. 74). Further, the author indicates

that one in five students will have an immigrant parent, and 17% will come from a home

where the primary language of communication is not English.

In addition, the Millennial cohort arrives from socio-economic family

backgrounds that grow more polarized with each passing year. Low-income students are

twice as likely to choose higher education paths that include community college than

high-income peers with similar academic qualifications. Broido (2004) claims "this

problem has been exacerbated by shifts in private and state-based financial aid awards

from need to merit and from grants to loans" (p. 75).

Broido (2004) also points to sexual orientation and gender identity as areas where

this generation differs from past generations. Contrasting the nearly 900 gay-straight

alliances in high schools across 46 states, as well as the tendency of more students to come out as early as elementary school and junior high with "reports of harassment and violence at the junior and senior high school levels [which] indicate that these remain exceedingly hostile environments" (p. 79), it is apparent that similar discontinuities will accompany students, along with their experiences and attitudes, to college campuses. Lacking accurate measures or tools of analysis, the author points to growing numbers of students who visibly identify with gender variant and non-heteronormative identities and ways of being. Campuses must find ways to incorporate, support and inculturate students with sexual orientations and gender identities that extend beyond the traditional monogamous heterosexual paradigm.

Finally, along with changes in the Millennial student cohort, Broido (2004) points out that family units in which students have been raised will reflect "single-parent families, blended and stepfamilies, and families with same-sex parents" (p. 76). Colleges and universities will need to resist and reconsider assumptions about students' families, and the ways in which institutions reach out to and embrace these critical constituencies.

Lucozzi (1998) alternatively frames institutional self-examination and the creation of a supportive campus climate for LGBTQ+ students as an issue related to student recruitment and retention, and preparation of students for work in diverse contexts. Noting that students are coming out at ever-earlier ages, the author argues that institutions visibly supportive of LGBTQ+ students are more likely to attract cohorts of students currently under-courted in the college environment. Further, the author identifies research showing that one-third of LGBTQ+ students fail to persist because of harassment issues on campus. The value of LGBTQ+-related climate initiatives may be seen in additional

7

students retained as campus climate grows more welcoming and supportive. Finally, the author urges that true preparation of students for life and work beyond colleges requires that they be able to appreciate the many differences in people they encounter, including differences in sexual orientation. Campuses that fail to challenge students to move beyond homophobia and heterosexism risk failing in their educational missions to prepare students in these ways.

Campus Climate and LGBTQ+ Identity Development

The climate of a campus, with regards to perceptions of support for diverse constituencies, also plays a significant role in the provision of opportunities that facilitate or disrupt processes of identity development. Engelken (1998) describes four meaning-making tools that campuses can employ to assist in creating an environment supportive of LGBTQ+ identity development. First, the author affirms that a campus must provide resources supportive of LGBTQ+ students. "[LGBTQ+] students should find themselves reflected in materials through the campus—in library acquisitions, class texts, magazines on sale in the bookstore, and professionals' offices" (p. 24). While a unified campus resource center for LGBTQ+ students is an important site of support and advocacy for LGBTQ+ students, "education, resources and support cannot be the sole responsibility of only one office, department or program. There must be an 'interrelation of campus resources' in order to serve students well" (p. 25). A major source of support comes from inclusion of LGBTQ+ themes interwoven through the curriculum.

The second tool described by Engelken (1998) is interpersonal opportunities. These are characterized by interactions with a diversity of people and ideas in a context of respect and openness to change, such as co-curricular programming opportunities that

function socially and educationally, exchanges with faculty both in and outside of the classroom, involvement in clubs and activities, and in critical dialogues where students are welcomed and encouraged to share themselves openly. "Far from trying to orchestrate specific answers to life's greatest questions, faculty and administrators must assist students' reflection upon their lives to discover those answers for themselves (p. 27).

The presence of role models, a third tool, involves institutional recruitment and support of openly LGBTQ+ faculty and staff to "testify to the possibility of the positive integration of sexuality with the rest of one's life" (p. 28). Finally, self-reflection is the fourth tool proposed by Engelken (1998), by which she challenges "as we encourage students to explore and clarify values, so must we review our own" (p. 29). By continuing to challenge individual preconceptions and assumptions, the author suggests that awareness will translate toward creating a campus climate that is constantly analyzed for potential growth in support of LGBTQ+ students and student identity development.

Transgender inclusion, apart from lesbian, gay, and bisexual counterparts who share a civil rights struggle and movement but often diverge in culture, goals and advocacy of transgender counterparts in times of stress (see The Michigan Messenger, 2007), is worthy of considerable note. LGB students may experience a level of acceptance on campus that far exceeds that experienced by transgender students in many ways, but creating a safe campus climate for transgender students is no less grounded in creating education and awareness, and providing opportunities for exploration and self-understanding, and fostering support services. Lees (1998) identifies transgender students as those for whom biological sex does not match gendered feelings of maleness or femaleness, or who reject the social construction of gender and/or sex altogether. It is

9

critical that colleges and universities engage in this work because "the time away at college is often the first chance to challenge the gender role assigned at birth and to decide how to integrate transgenderness into life as an adult" (p. 37). Yet Lees fails to note that critical racial intersections create divergences of goals, values and advocacy priorities within communities marginalized by sexual orientation and gender identity as Trans and Queer People of Color (QTPOC) have different and unique issues that manifest and require redress, but often fail to receive voice, attention or advocacy from similarly marginalized white people.

While the work of transgender advocacy on campus has extended a great deal beyond Lees' (1998) very tentative suggestions in the fifteen years hence, they remain a bedrock of practice and more applicable than historical on many campuses. Indeed, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) explore current experiences of harassment and violence, or of a hostile environment, experienced by self-identified transgender people. The authors also consider the ways that transgender individuals have chosen to respond to incidents of harassment or violence. While the experiences reported by study participants vary, many or most report having experienced incidents of a hostile environment, of being harassed, or of being the victim of violence. More often than not, experiences went unreported because of an uncertainty of how and whether responders would offer fair and impartial treatment to transgender reporters. Further analysis considers how participants experienced employment and promotion in work contexts. The authors conclude that despite decades of awareness raising and social progress, those who identify as or are believed to be "transgender commonly continue to face discrimination, harassment, and bias-motivated violence in many areas of their lives. These conditions mean that many

transgender people are unemployed or underemployed and, as a result, face a constant struggle for economic security" (p. 106).

Providing for transgender visibility, by including transgender topics in programming, welcoming transgender students to participate in student organizations and programming created for and by those marginalized around sexual orientation and gender identity, and reviewing policies and practices that intentionally or unintentionally parse and exclude based on gender characteristics, is a start towards campus inclusion. Further providing resources and contacts for transgender students to connect with one another and supportive faculty and staff, including, for instance, counseling center staff, is a critical second step. Finally, connecting transgender students to campus and local resources that can help facilitate gender re-assignment, as desired, and assuring that campus administration processes recognize and re-assign transitioning students' genders is also paramount (Lees, 1998). Where natural connections do exist for LGB students on campus, they may be significantly circumscribed for transgender students making the presence, support and advocacy that an LGBT Resource Center can provide even more critical.

Movement Towards LGBT Resource Centers

Today's relatively accepting and supportive campus climate for gays and lesbians belies an oppressive history whereby students identified or even just rumored to be gay faced automatic expulsion. Dilley (2002) traces a history of higher education from 1945 through the 1960s that mirrored larger cultural and social trends that criminalized, demonized, and then pathologized gay identity and behavior. Later trends from the 1970s through the 1990s included efforts by institutions to restrict association of gay students

11

on and off campus, as well as to deny recognition and funding of student groups supportive of gay social or political activities.

The Student Homophile League at Columbia University was founded in 1967 following a contentious year-long battle between students and administrators. The following year, chapters were formed at Cornell University and New York University. The Stonewall Riots that followed in 1969 would be recognized as the beginning of the modern gay and lesbian civil rights movement. The 1970s marked the founding of similar campus organizations catering to sexual minorities on most large, public and prestigious campuses, with particular concentrations on the West Coast and in New England.

The move to establish these sites of campus LGB presence was resisted and hard-fought throughout these four decades by other students, faculty and administration, and even state legislators and the public. A significant body of case law has grown from the movement to support the First and Fourteenth Amendment rights of students to expect equal recognition and treatment of LGBT student organizations and assembly as are afforded other campus clubs and groups (Mallory, 1998). The 1980s saw increasing representation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) student groups across campuses in the Midwest and South (Mallory, 1998). In response to student pressures, the first campus office serving LGBT students was established under a reluctant administration at the University of Michigan in 1971 (Sanlo, Rankin, & Schoenberg, 2002).

Since then, many campuses have created LGBT resource or culture centers whose broad missions include promoting a campus environment that is welcoming and attractive to prospective students and families, that fully includes current LGBTQ+ members, and that aligns with mission outcomes for graduates' ability to function in a global workplace.

12

While creation of an inclusive environment requires efforts from across the campus, the LGBT Resource Center on a campus can be a hub of activity, critical resistance and forward movement in confronting and transforming a campus culture for the better.

Today's lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) campus spaces serve multiple purposes. LGBT clubs or groups fulfill a social need by providing a safe, comfortable environment where LGBTQ+ students can meet together and socialize on campus. This process can ease common "feelings of loneliness and isolation on campus" (Mallory, 1998, p. 323), and provide an opportunity for those who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity to establish connections with other non-heteronormative students. Student involvement in LGBTQ+ organizations can serve a political purpose, as students pair an understanding of their individual and collective rights and responsibilities as members of a marginalized and oppressed social group with efforts intended to create social and cultural change consistent with socially just outcomes. Interactions and associations with others who share an LGBTQ+ identity can provide support and encouragement to students who are struggling with coming out or seeking to find meaning in intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, race, faith and family. Finally LGBT groups celebrate gay culture and normalize gay existence by educating the campus community with lectures, panel discussions, films, workshops, conferences, safe space programs and social justice awareness weeks and activities (Mallory, 1998).

Efficacy of LGBT Resource Centers

The presence of an LGBT Center on a campus is a powerful and visible symbol. Often accompanied by staff who are charged with support, programming and advocacy supportive of LGBTQ+ students, the very existence of a Center has the potential to move

a campus towards a more inclusive campus climate, to focus campus resources on LGBTQ+ identity development of students, and redirect the energies of LGBTQ+ people and allies among students, faculty and staff who have demanded change and fought for progress.

Those who are involved with centers are passionate that the safe spaces that they provide assist students in meeting their potential, and align with the mission of their institutions. Most Center staff have a healthy reserve of anecdotes that illustrate the effectiveness of centers at meeting the needs of students and assisting them in overcoming institutional and developmental obstacles. Historically, provision of such examples has been enough to maintain institutional support.

However, the landscape of higher education is in flux as it relates to evidence-based assessment that describes the real value and impact of institutional claims regarding the value of the curriculum and the learning of students (Bers & Swing, 2010). Examples of a Center's successes shared second-hand from student feedback or staff observation are insufficient to meet the growing standard of effective assessment (Suskie, 2009).

Positing assessment as a "process, the purpose of which is to discern student learning, performance and achievement in the aggregate" (Bers & Swing, 2010, p. 5), the authors maintain that effective assessment must take place at institutional, unit and course or function levels. Huba and Freed (2000) define assessment similarly suggesting that it involves collection and analysis of multiple, diverse sources of evidence that collectively provide "a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences" (p. 8). Both sets of authors insist

that assessment results must be used to refine educational practice and improve learner outcomes with each subsequent cycle of implementation.

Gray (2010) builds on this idea of assessment's tendency towards cyclical change by setting aside the idea of miraculous transformation. Instead, the author maintains "the process of assessment is a means for guiding systematic, incremental positive changes that over time add up to the transformation of institutions or departments in order to better achieve goals and objectives and meet the demands of accountability" (p. 180). Efforts towards assessment inform the campus about itself, and allow institutional stakeholders to truly understand how and when efforts towards LGBTQ+ inclusion are successful, and how they might be made better.

Landmark publications in the literature of student development, such as the Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1996) and *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004) have called upon practitioners to create intentional linkages between student learning that takes place inside the classroom, and that which takes place in co-curricular contexts. "Wherever student learning and development are supposed to happen, there should be goals for that learning, and assessments to see how well students are achieving those goals" (Suskie, 2009, p. 9). It cannot be assumed that existing assessment strategies at the institutional or divisional levels capture evidence of LGBT student and Center outcomes. Further, the advocacy and consultation functions of a Center demand that it push beyond its own borders to request and compel other units that provide services for LGBT students to also provide evidence for the efficacy of those efforts. Centers must be able to provide evidence of the ways in which intended outcomes are

achieved, or they risk a loss of resources, and diminishing credibility within their respective institutions.

Purpose of the Study

LGBT Center missions commonly suggest activities intended to advocate for and empower LGBTQ+ students, to create safe spaces where students are able to interact authentically and engage their identity development, and to cultivate skills and strategies that help students overcome microaggressions, obstacles and barriers to their success. Yet few studies have been conducted to provide evidence of the essential value of centers in meeting their missions and purposes. The research field is wide open for exploration of the value and meaning of LGBT culture centers in the context of their institutional homes.

The purpose of this study is to explore the essential value of LGBT Centers. In particular, the study will consider: what are historical and current contexts of the LGBT Centers? What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students? Who are the centers for and what purposes do they serve? What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity?

The final questions are, in some ways, most interesting and critical to the survival of LGBT Centers in a context of increasingly scarce resources and the perception of growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. Providing evidence that centers contribute in meaningful ways to the core mission of the institution could sustain some centers through future periods of economic challenge and institutional contraction.

Research Questions

The study will answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are historical and current contexts of LGBT Centers?

RQ2: What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students?

RQ3: Who are the centers for and what purposes do they serve?

RQ4: What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The research will be conducted using a case study framework. Glesne (2011) describes a case as "a bounded, integrated system with working parts," often studied through direct observations, interviews, and document analysis. Case study analysis often takes place over time and seeks to move beyond surface observations and analyses to reveal and consider each case's core issues. In instances where multiple discrete cases are studied simultaneously, analysis can take place both individually and collectively, allowing the researcher to delve into "a phenomenon, population or general condition" (Stake, 2000, p. 437) through a collective case study analysis. This study will use both qualitative methods to achieve this purpose.

Although more thoroughly explored in the second chapter's review of the literature, this research draws upon theoretical understandings of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender identity development, and more general understandings of theories related to college students' psychosocial, cognitive, and identity development. Queer

17

theory provides additional frameworks for analysis of LGBT students' campus experiences. Current research around microaggressions helps inform understandings of the barriers to persistence experienced by LGBT students, and provides space for exploration of the ways that LGBT Centers diminish those obstacles. Finally, the domain of culture centers is explore from their origins as Black Culture Centers established in the late 60s through their development in service to various underrepresented and need-specific cohorts within the academy.

Significance of Study

This study represents inquiry valuable to practitioners and theorists of student development, and to leaders in higher education. Utilizing triangulation to answer research questions through multiple modes of qualitative inquiry, the research will seek to understand the historical and current contexts of LGBT Centers and the nature of campus climates for LGBTQ+ students. It considers the purposes and communities served by centers, and the ways that LGBT Centers find congruence between their missions and purposes and the activities in which they engage, as well as how they assist students in navigating institutional spaces that are hostile to their identities.

Further, this research is important and instructive for practitioners who work with LGBTQ+ students in a college setting or with LGBT Centers. While each student affairs administrator carries a theoretical understanding of LGBTQ+ identity development cultivated through preparation programs, and experiences working with LGBTQ+ students, it is informative to understand the very specific ways that LGBTQ+ students are supported by resource centers targeted to their needs, and the ways that those centers could be more effective in offering support. Further, there is value in understanding these

interactions through the voices and experiences of those serving and served by LGBTQ+ resource centers.

Finally, this study gives voice to the experiences and development of current students in relation to the support of LGBTQ+ resource centers, to those that work in, direct and oversee said centers, and invites the attention and discussion of those currently charged with implementation of programs to support existing and potential centers on campuses. In so doing, this study has the potential to narrow the existing gap between the needs of LGBTQ+ students and the LGBT Center's ability to understand and attend to those needs.

Definitions

This study uses terms and words that are common, but that also have specific contextual meanings related to the research. To avoid confusion, definitions follow for critical terms. First, terms related to sexual orientation and gender identity are listed alphabetically, followed by terms related to research and methodology.

Terms Related to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Bisexual. Describes those who experience sexual and affectional attractions to same-sex and opposite-sex others.

Gay. Describes those who experience sexual and affectional attractions to same-sex others. Often used to refer to both men and women, or just to men when so modified, as in "gay men".

Gender. Describes the social construction of maleness and femaleness, as characteristics both masculine and feminine, that also correspond to the biological placement of the reproductive organs as external or internal, and/or the make-up of the

23rd chromosome as XY or XX, respectively.

Gender binary. Describes a strict social construction of gender as either male or female, as corresponding with biological and chromosomal sex characteristics. Resistance to the gender binary is found among those whose sex and gender do not correspond, or who find the gender binary confining to their preferred expression or non-expression of gender. The binary also does not account for or explain those who are transgendered or other-gendered, or whose genital composition reflects characteristics inconsistent with or in combination of both the penis and vagina.

Gender identity. The way that one expresses gender, often as masculine or feminine, but may also include less common gender expressions, such as butch dyke, genderqueer, sissyfag, or even gender expressions that are entirely unique to an individual.

Heterosexual. Describes those who experience sexual and affectional attractions to opposite-sex others.

Identity development. The process by which one comes to understand their sexual and affectional attractions.

Lesbian. Describes women who experience sexual and affectional attractions to other women.

LGB. An acronym for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual, describing collectively those who identify with these labels, and only very rarely incorporating additional identities or variations.

LGBQ+. Refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer and others marginalized by sexual orientation, parsing those marginalized by sexual orientation from communities

grouped and/or characterized by gender identity. Often used with TGNC when describing broader communities marginalized by sexual orientation and gender identity, as in LGBQ+ and TGNC communities.

LGBTQ+. An acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender, often used as a broadly reaching term that describes non-heteronormative people, and allies. Sometimes expressed as LGBTQQIAA+ where the additional letters might represent Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexuals and Allies and the "+" sign symbolizes many additional identities within the non-heteronormative umbrella, such as pansexual, fluid, same-gender loving, two-spirit, mamoo, butch, etc. LGBT is sometimes substituted for LGBTQ+ but generally also refers to the spectrum of identities marginalized around sexual orientation and gender identity.

LGBT (Resource) Center. Typically a physical space on a college campus designed to serve the needs of LGBTQ+ students by creating a safe space where students can exist as their authentic selves, and providing services around advocacy, programming, education, policy and awareness.

Microaggression. "Brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (Sue, 2010, p. 24) bounded by characteristics such as race, gender, gender identity, sexual-orientation, religious belief, ability, socio-economic status, etc. Readers are invited to consider invisible messages that are both verbal and non-verbal, as well as delivered environmentally.

Sex. Biological description of individuals as male or female based on the general configuration of the reproductive organs as external or internal, and/or the make-up of the 23rd chromosome as XY or XX, respectively

TGNC. Refers to Transgender and Gender Non Conforming, parsing those marginalized by gender identity from communities grouped and/or characterized by sexual orientation. Often used with LGBQ+ when describing broader communities marginalized by sexual orientation and gender identity, as in LGBQ+ and TGNC communities.

Trans or Transgender. A person whose biology and gender identity do not conform to the male/masculine and female/feminine binary.

Terms Related to Research and Methodology

Assessment. Positing assessment as a "process, the purpose of which is to discern student learning, performance and achievement in the aggregate" (Bers & Swing, 2010, p. 5), the authors maintain that effective assessment must take place at institutional, unit and course or function levels. Huba and Freed (2000) define assessment similarly suggesting that it involves collection and analysis of multiple, diverse sources of evidence that collectively provide "a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences" (p. 8). Both sets of authors insist that assessment results must be used to refine educational practice and improve learner outcomes with each subsequent cycle of implementation. Gray (2010) builds on this idea of assessment's tendency towards cyclical change by setting aside the idea of miraculous transformation. Instead, the author maintains "the process of assessment is a means for guiding systematic, incremental positive changes that over time add up to the transformation of institutions or departments in order to better achieve goals and objectives and meet the demands of accountability" (p. 180).

Triangulation. Refers to a strategy where multiple sources of data are collected concurrently or simultaneously regarding each case, and then juxtaposed in analysis to generate more richly constructed meanings and facilitate highly informed conclusions (Creswell, 2007).

Assumptions

Research requires a number of assumptions. In interview-driven qualitative research it is assumed that participants were honest and forthright in the recollections, observations and interpretations of their experiences. It must be further assumed that researchers are capable of analyzing the interview transcripts as data, coding the contents to draw out critical themes, and accurately representing the content of the interviews in a reliable and authentic manner.

This study draws on traditions of qualitative inquiry. As a case study inquiry the research is grounded in the assumption that all research shares a bias regardless of the tradition of methodology. To mitigate this bias, the researcher has made efforts as documented in Chapter 3 to create self-awareness and to draw careful boundaries that carefully circumscribe and attend to the role of the researcher as meaning is made of the data and conclusions are drawn.

Summary

For LGBT Centers to continue to serve the needs of LGBTQ+ students on campus, efforts must be focused on understanding how Centers' outcomes align and depart from their intentions. In the current assessment climate, a failure to provide evidence of Center efficacy will result in diminished campus influence and Center resources. Further research that examines the experiences of LGBTQ+ student identity

development and college persistence in relation to LGBT Center efforts is necessary for

making the case for a continued and essential campus presence.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED MATERIAL

Introduction

The following pages provide a theoretical grounding for understanding the rise and roles of LGBT Centers. First, current understandings specific to identity development for LGBT college students are explored, along with more general theories of college student development. Queer theory is posited as a lens that helps maintain the centrality of non-heteronormativity in the analysis of fundamental aspects of student learning and development on campus. Next, a thorough discussion of microaggressions is posited as a way of understanding fundamental shifts in the manner that LGBT persons are experiencing resistance to full participation and inclusion in critical institutional activities and experiences. Finally, the existing literature around culture centers in higher education that serve to support underrepresented students is explored.

Theories of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Identity Development

Starting in the 1940's, Alfred Kinsey conducted research into human sex behaviors, one of the outcomes of which was to understand that same-sex sexual experiences were more common and less aberrant among humans than previously believed. Kinsey developed a continuum scale of 0 representing exclusive heterosexuality and 6 representing exclusive homosexuality as he explored human sexual behavior through interviews – many, many interviews – almost 18,000 by the time he passed

away, of which 8,000 were conducted by Kinsey himself. The work was both qualitative and quantitative because Kinsey believed that social pressures and standards of the time would lead participants towards distortion or "halo effect" in their responses. Therefore, he used in-person inquiries to challenge inconsistencies in responses and to gather more accurate results. While Kinsey revolutionized sex research in his time, repositioning it as a biological inquiry rather than a philosophical or morally grounded inquiry, he was both lauded and criticized for normalizing homosexual behavior and non-traditional or even "deviant" sexual practice, such as masturbation, and anal or oral intercourse (Bullough, 1998).

Kinsey's work also inspired decades-long research agendas, many that persist today, in fields of psychology, sociology, biology, history, anthropology, education and others, as fellow researchers attempted to understand the phenomena of same-sex sexuality and its implications for their fields. As noted previously, colleges, as reflections of the larger culture, have seen dramatic shifts in institutional response to students with LGBT identities (Dilley, 2002; Mallory, 1989; Porter, 1998), and research related to LGBT identity development has evolved similarly.

Within the context of working with students, the earliest theoretical models that gained favor among student affairs practitioners were models that understood gay and lesbian identity formation as a series of linear developmental stages through which students would progress. Cass's (1979) is one of the most well-known of these, and she describes a process of becoming homosexual marked by six unique stages. In introducing the model, the author noted similarities of structure to other identity development theories of the time, such as Cross's Nigrescence Theory (Skipper, 2005), Richardson's (1957)

26

theory of cultural assimilation by British migrants in Australia, and Taft's (1957) assimilation theory. She also differentiated the work from previous theoretical work around gay and lesbian identity, by noting that earlier pieces had attempted to create typologies of homosexual identities, or to describe "problems encountered by homosexuals in managing their homosexual identity" (Cass, 1979, p. 219), but "little empirical study has been made of *how* an individual acquires a homosexual identity" (p. 219).

In the model's first stage, identity confusion, the individual experiences same-sex attractions and experiences distress as he or she attempts to resolve a heterosexual self image and social expectation with same-sex desires and physical contact. The second stage, identity comparison, describes the individual as entertaining the possibility that he or she may be gay or lesbian, and responding to that possibility in several possible ways. A person may: resist the new identity through acts of will or by seeking therapy; embrace the closet, and compartmentalize their sexuality and sexual behavior as separate and hidden from more socially acceptable aspects of the self; or reject the normalcy of heterosexuality and begin to embrace an understanding of oneself as lesbian or gay. For individuals who make a stronger commitment towards a lesbian or gay identity, the third stage, identity tolerance, ushers in a period of exploration and contact with other gays and lesbians. The individual may then come to learn how others experience themselves as gays or lesbians, and begin to form the idea of how he or she might live a gay or lesbian life (Cass, 1979).

In stage 4, identity acceptance, the individual engages more openly with other gays and lesbians, but still may remain closeted to most heterosexuals, often passing as

heterosexual in social and employment contexts that are largely heteronormative. Internally, however, the individual becomes unsettled with or resentful of the social expectation that the gay or lesbian self is unacceptable or should be kept hidden. Identity pride, stage 5, marks a period when the gay or lesbian individual immerses him or herself in understanding gay and lesbian culture, history, and this new identity. This stage may be marked by a rejection of mainstream culture, and anger towards acts and systems of oppression towards gays and lesbians. Some individuals may become involved in activism or engage a degree of separatism. This may also mark a time when the individual chooses to come out in various or all aspects of his or her life and to live authentically as a gay or lesbian person. Stage 6, identity synthesis, is a space of greater balance. The gay or lesbian individual comes to understand his or her identity as one aspect of the self, but to also honor other important aspects that contribute to identity. The individual often re-engages with supportive straight allies, and identifies mainstream places and spaces that are supportive of his or her whole self (Cass, 1979).

Cass (1979) importantly points out that development may be forestalled in any of the six stages. For instance, if a person in stage two determines that early same-sex attractions diminish in comparison to newly-felt opposite sex attractions, the person may ultimately assume a heterosexual identity moving forward. Or an individual in stage 4 may determine that coming out to family or in the workplace is too great a risk, and maintain a gay or lesbian sphere of contact exclusive from those other work or family interactions. Cass cautions that these choices do not represent developmental failures, but individual choices, compromises and ways of navigating through toxic social and cultural environments.

Cass's (1979) Homosexual Identity Formation model is a piece of the bedrock of student development theory and understandings of LGBT identity development. Indeed, in a follow-up piece, the author challenged that work around homosexual identity was conceptualizing the term in contradictory ways, and called for researchers to extend their thinking of sexual identity to include its many interconnections with related inquiries. "What, for example, might we learn about heterosexual identity? How might our knowledge of the homosexual situation aid our understanding of other minority identities? Ultimately, the study of homosexual identity should allow us to consider the whole question of human identity" (Cass, 1984).

In the intervening decades, many theorists have contributed to this understanding of LGBT identity development by building on Cass's (1979, 1984) work, or suggesting alternative processes. For instance, Troiden (1989) draws on the work of previous identity theorists and researchers to formulate a four stage model of homosexual identity formation through a sociological lens. Using commonly reported experiences from pre-existing survey data with self-identified gays and lesbians, Troiden's four stages describe common pathways and experiences whereby individuals experience sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption and commitment.

It is telling that in Troiden's (1989) discussion of the model, he points to differentiation by generational cohort in the average ages of particular common experiences, such as first romantic relationship, or age of initial identity disclosure, with more recent cohorts "coming out" earlier. Continued research in the ensuing two decades indicates that as social stigmas related to homosexual identity have declined, related

coming out experiences continue to occur at relatively earlier ages, almost approaching simultaneity with heterosexual peers.

Fassinger (1998) offers a critique of existing stage models of gay, lesbian and bisexual identity development, pointing out that traditional theories conflate two distinct processes: the first bounded by the individual's coming-to-terms with her or his same-sex attractions, and the second focused on affiliation and identification with an oppressed other. This stands in stark contrast to traditional models whereby "developmental maturity thus becomes synonymous with public disclosure of identity, and less public ('closeted') behaviors are viewed as developmental arrest" (p. 16). In Fassinger's (1998) model, progress towards both individual and social identity development takes place concurrently, and in the context of environmental threats and pressures that may curtail the expression of developmental outcomes. "The linking of public disclosure and involvement in the LGB community with integrated identity ignores the social realities of many LGB people who feel compelled to maintain the privacy of their sexual identity for pressing contextual reasons" (p. 16).

As an alternative, Fassinger (1998) offers an empirically validated stage model developed from samples of diverse lesbians and gay men. The Inclusive Model of Lesbian/Gay Identity Formation describes four stages: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, internalization/synthesis. Each stage is experienced along two separate but reciprocal identity processes identified as Individual Sexual Identity and Group Membership Identity. "Self-disclosure in this model is not viewed as an index of developmental advancement, allowing for diverse paths to an integrated LGB identity" (p. 18).

Grounding her theory in a combined understanding of existing work on sexual

identity development (Cass, 1979; Levine & Evans, 1991) and racial identity

development (Hardiman & Jackson, 1992), Sullivan (1998) proposes a five stage model

of sexual identity development. Tracing a developmental trajectory that extends through

naiveté, acceptance, resistance, redefinition, and internalization, what sets the work of

Sullivan apart from other theorists is her inclusive approach to articulating the

experiences of heterosexual, as well as lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons. In describing

the developmental challenges of an evolving heterosexuality, Sullivan radically draws

into question the normative dominance of the cultural majority. While her proffered stage

analysis and intervention discussion are useful, it is her treatment of the dominant

orientation as one common path among equals that draws her treatment of sexual identity

development into the theoretical cannon.

Stage models, including Cass's (1979), continue to be widely taught in graduate

preparation programs for student affairs and used regularly by professionals in their work

with LGB students, despite critics' assertions that the models artificially

compartmentalize developmental processes in ways that aren't universally captured by

life experiences, or for failing to acknowledge and account for the ways that multiple

identities interact in the lives of people of color or people of faith, for instance. As such,

Bilodeau and Renn (2005) problematize these traditional understandings to consider more

fully the diverse lived experiences and identities of adolescents, bisexuals, people of

color, and women. The authors also posit complex intersections between LGB identity

and faith, class, culture and ability. While the authors articulate the challenges and

limitations incumbent upon stage models to accurately describe a diversity of unique

31

developmental trajectories, they also note "the predominance and persistence of stage

models in the research literature and in current educational practice suggest that they

represent with some accuracy the developmental process" (p. 26).

The authors draw upon life span approaches as an alternative mode of

understanding LGB identity. The life span model treats sexual orientation and identity

development as "unfolding in concurring and multiple paths" (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p.

28) across domains or continuums. Development in each domain can take place relatively

independently of that in other domains, and a person's life experiences may track back

and forth across a continuum unassociated with judgments of progress or regression, as

might be associated with a stage model. D'Augelli (1994) posits a very popular lifespan

model that understands identity development as an ongoing, lifelong process.

D'Augelli (1994) frames six trajectories related to lesbian and gay identity that he

says describe major facets of development. D'Augelli's work is grounded in

developmental plasticity, or the idea that processes of becoming are shaped by

environmental circumstances, and physical and biological factors. All of these inputs are

reflected in the ways that individuals change, grow and develop in their self-

conceptualization. The first of D'Augelli's trajectories is exiting heterosexual identity.

Here, he discusses that in a heteronormative social environment, gays and lesbians, as

non-dominant social actors, must continually tell others about their identity or be

assumed heterosexual. The telling can be directive or circumstantial. For instance, a man

comes out when he says "I am gay" which is very directive, or when he discusses his

boyfriend or husband or other circumstances of his life that conform with a non-

heterosexual identity. The second trajectory, or process, involves developing a personal

LGB identity status, and the closely related third involves developing an LGB social identity, as one makes meaning of what it means to be homosexual internally and externally. The fourth trajectory involves becoming an LGB offspring, or redefining one's family relationships in the context of one's evolving sexual identity, and the fifth involves developing an LGB intimacy status. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) explain "the lack of cultural scripts directly applicable to lesbian/gay/bisexual people leads to ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also forces the emergence of personal, couple-specific, and community norms, which should be more personally adaptive" (p. 97). Finally, D'Augelli's sixth trajectory is entering an LGB community whereby a commitment is made to social change or political action.

In concluding discussion of his model, D'Augelli (1994) expresses "a revision of our operational definition of sexual orientation must occur, allowing for study of the continuities and discontinuities, the flexibilities and cohesiveness, of sexual and affectional feelings across the life span, in diverse contexts, and in relationship to culture and history" (p. 331). Thus a major difference between Cass (1979) and other stage models, and D'Augelli (1994), is that stage models conceptualize that a person moves through a series of developmental stages and that ultimately there is a preferred landing spot. A person ends up completing stage four, or five or six and is then fully realized as an LGB individual. D'Augelli argues for many of the same developmental experiences that Cass recognizes, but states that a person is never fully realized. Rather that individuals make forward and backward progress throughout their lives across all trajectories simultaneously, and that there is no right place, goal place, or end place to target.

Like D'Augelli (1994), other theorists have developed grounded theories that describe the identity development process for LGB individuals, some carrying the work further to address critiques that existing models continue to fail to address multiple identities and identity intersections. For instance, Stevens (2004) used grounded theory to articulate a model of gay student identity development that takes place in collegiate environments. Through a series of interviews with 11 undergraduate gay men, the author explores and refines their experiences to identify a major developmental category--finding empowerment--and argues that it is integrated with five lesser categories: self-acceptance, disclosure to others, individual factors, environmental influences and multiple identities exploration.

What Stevens (2004) aptly explores in his developmental model is the complexity of intersections of individual identity that are constantly evolving in the developmental process. Sexual identity is constructed in the context of relationships, race, religion, culture, environment and an evolving self. While previous models and concepts of lesbian and gay identity development show various degrees of understanding of this complexity, Stevens' model may do the best job yet of relating this as an interconnected, inseparable network of multi-directional influences.

Most of the work discussed thus far discusses the experiences of LGB, or lesbian, gay and bisexual students. However, the inclusion of bisexual identity in models posited so far often assumes that bisexual experience is generally similar to the experiences of gays and lesbians. Very little research exists to affirm this assumption, and even less has been devoted to describing the identity development process for bisexuals. Emphasizing the importance of campus climate, O'Brien (1998) raises awareness about the experience

34

of bisexual students on campus. "For bisexual people, there is no large-scale or widespread 'bisexual subculture'" (p. 31), but no less a need for bisexual students to understand themselves and make meaning of their attractions in the context of their lives. The author maintains that even well-intended efforts to include gay and lesbian history and themes in the curriculum can do unintentional harm to bisexual students when claims are made, for example, regarding "demonstrably bisexual historical figures as homosexual, rendering the genuine history of bisexuality even more invisible" (p. 32).

The social pressure to conform to the heterosexual/homosexual binary is strong, and O'Brien (1998) points out many assumptions and stereotypes that accompany bisexuality, and serve as both cultural education and broad misperception regarding the lived experiences of bisexuals. The widespread invisibility of bisexuality "has often led bisexual people to feel a need to choose one gender only and accept the identity that comes with that choice: Either gay or straight. Bisexual people are urged to deny a part of self and "pass" as a member of an accepted category" (p. 33).

Meeting the needs of bisexual students starts with "unbiased and considerate treatment" (O'Brien, 1998, p. 33). This means acknowledging bisexual identity on campus, avoiding assumptions based on observations of student conduct and behavior, and allowing for students to be safe in the bisexual identities that they express without pressure to conform to or develop further in alignment with the sexual orientation binary. O'Brien cautions that the process of coming out is perhaps more stressful for bisexuals than other sexual minorities, because they "often meet with resistance from both the straight and gay worlds, as well as with their own internalized cultural values, which rarely see bisexuality as a valid option" (p. 34). By creating space on campus for bisexual

students to explore identity and attraction, the campus climate can be made supportive, rather than antagonistic, for bisexual students.

Another independent and unique identity that gets collapsed into the LGBT framework is that of transgender students. However, little of the identity modeling that exists addresses the unique context or experience of transgender individuals. Research by Bilodeau (2005) suggests that transgender experience and identity may be more closely described by the life span approach than the stage model. Through interviews with two trans-identified students at a large, Midwestern public university, Bilodeau adapts the D'Augelli (1994) lifespan model of sexual orientation identity development to describe a transgender developmental trajectory. Aware of historical and current attitudes that pathologize transgender identity and experience, Bilodeau is careful to articulate this adapted model such that it supports transgender identity as a normal human response situated in a maladaptive cultural construction of a gender binary.

With six reconceptualized developmental processes that substitute transgender identity and community for its LGB counterparts, Bilodeau (2005) gives voice to his participants as they describe critical life experiences through the model's revised lens. While his participants are able to interpret their experiences along these six concurrent processes, the research fails to explore alternatives that may better describe transgender identity development in an entirely new frame of reference. More exploration with increased numbers of diverse participants may support that this revised model best captures transgender identity development, or it may open doors to entirely new ways of understanding its context and complexity.

36

To that end, Beemyn and Rankin (2011) present an unparalleled and enlightening work on transgender development and experience. Through a survey of nearly 3500 self-identified transgender people, along with over 400 follow-up interviews, this mixed-methods study both clarifies and problematizes our understanding and conceptualization of transgender development. Through quantitative analysis, the authors parse the survey data to understand transgender identity through varied demographic lenses, from sexual orientation and race, to gender identity and expression, to age and ability status. Disaggregating the quantitative results in multiple ways is, in and of itself, a fascinating process, made more so through connections to the qualitative elements that serve to articulate a range of experiences beyond the gender binary.

Relying heavily on the qualitative aspects of the research project, the researchers describe common experiences of people who identify under the transgender umbrella, including aspects of coming to terms with dissonance between gender as assigned versus gender as experienced, or acting in ways that transgress a socially assigned gender. Hearing transgender participants describe their experiences in their own voices is powerful, and Beemyn and Rankin (2011) show incredible respect towards and awareness of their participants in the ways that they incorporate participants' voices into the text. And this is where the clarity of data presentation turns to conceptual problematization of the transgender concept, because the monolithic label of transgender is shown again and again to be anything but. "The 1211 individuals who identified specifically as 'transgender' provided 502 additional descriptors for their gender identities, of which 479 were unique responses" (p. 23). Ultimately, transgender becomes a blanket way of describing identities and experiences that are at once universal and

always individuated, because gender is experienced as an individual, but always in relation to others and the social order. Thus the concept itself is paradoxical, perhaps necessarily so.

Perhaps most importantly, the authors provide a novel approach for understanding transgender identity development. Beemyn and Rankin (2011) describe a milestone schema that describes common experiences of transgender individuals across transitional identity groups, such as FTMs, MTFs, cross-dressers and genderqueers. While understanding that gender identity development is so personal that no two experiences are identical, the authors draw upon participant experiences to pull together extremely common themes, such as "repressing or hiding one's [felt] gender identity in the face of hostility and/or isolation" (p. 116), "whether and when to tell others," and "developing new relationships after disclosure" (p. 116). This milestones schema is useful, but because it is loosely conceptualized, it is inclusive to experiences fluidly drawn from across the gender continuum. It seems incredibly fitting that a method of conceptualizing gender identity development should be as flexible as the concept and experience it attempts to describe.

Bilodeau and Renn (2005) reinforce that the predominant Western mode of understanding transgender experience is a series of inter-related psychiatric and medical conditions with associated interventions and solutions that purport to align gender identity and biological expression within the Western gender binary. The authors juxtapose this clinical approach first with spiritual and cultural systems that honor and celebrate gender variance, and secondly with political and social movements that question the normativity of the gender binary altogether. The focus on creating

38

congruence with the male-female binary "does not fully address the needs of individuals who, for a variety of reasons, may forgo gender reassignment surgery or may define gender identity as existing outside binary notions of male or female identities" (Bilodeau & Renn, p. 31).

The authors caution "practitioners and scholars must take into account the value-laden nature of theories related to sexual orientation and gender identity development" (p. 33). In formulating policy and actively supporting students in their human development, professionals must understanding that the ways in which they understand these processes themselves and describe them to others has profound implications within existing systems of campus power. Theories of identity development for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students are fundamental to the work of student affairs practitioners with their LGBT students. Yet their LGBT students are also college students who share common pathways of development with other students unrelated to identity. The discussion now shifts to basic frameworks for understanding college student development more generally.

Theories of College Student Development

While theories that describe how students develop a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender identity are critical to the work of student affairs practitioners, the broader body of theories that describe college student development more generally are equally so. Student development theories are generally understood as psychosocial, or theories that describe the ways that students come to understand themselves as relational beings, and those grounded in cognitive development, or the ways that students process their complex

39

environments and interact with those around them. This treatment will discuss theories as grouped within that framework.

Schlossberg (1989) explored the ways that people feel that they matter or are marginal in the roles they embody, and the impact of belonging on value and worth. Positing these conditions as polar, the author observes that feelings of mattering are characterized by five dimensions: attention, importance, ego-extension, dependence and appreciation. Similarly, feelings of marginalization can be temporary or transitional or permanent. Temporary marginalization occurs during liminal or transitional stages, when one is neither what one was or what one is becoming, such as during the transition from high school to college where one is neither a high school student nor yet a college student. Yet as relationships are formed, a person becomes valued in the new community and marginalization wanes as feelings of mattering increase. This is juxtaposed with permanent marginalization imposed externally by social or cultural constructs, or internally by personality characteristics. Finally, Schlossberg explores the role that intentionality and rituals can have in contributing to feelings of mattering and belonging, and reducing feelings or experiences of marginalization.

A foundational psychosocial theory was posited by Chickering (1969) and updated in 1993 by Chickering and Reiser and describes student development along seven "vectors." These vectors, or developmental pathways, are generally thought to be consistent with how students grow and mature through the collegiate experience. Progress may be concurrent across several vectors simultaneously depending on each student's individual collegiate experiences (Skipper, 2005).

The first vector, Developing Competence, describes the process of establishing oneself as an intellectual, physical and interpersonal actor on the campus. Managing Emotions is a second vector, and describes the attainment of a balance between self-control and self-expression, including the development of coping skills adequate to match increased levels of stress associated with academic work, campus employment, social pressures and relationship distance. A third vector, Moving Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence, is characterized by the realization that one is not self-sufficient, but must find a balance between depending on oneself and depending on others (Skipper, 2005).

Establishing Identity, whereby students begin to understand and solidify themselves, their identities, their values and beliefs in a coherent self-concept, and Developing Purpose, a period when students determine their passions and clarify their values such that they can commit to future plans and pathways are the fifth and sixth vectors. Developing Integrity is a final vector that sees students humanizing their values, or finding a balance between self-interests and the interests of others, owning and embodying their values, and allowing values and beliefs to guide their choices and behaviors (Skipper, 2005).

Chickering's vectors remain relevant over 40 years after their development, and continue to resonate strongly with the experiences and growth patterns of college students. Theorists and practitioners continue to evaluate and refine the ways that theories apply to students who bring vastly different experiences and backgrounds to college today, than they did when the theories were first posited. For instance, Fassinger (1998) points out that within the domain of psychosocial theories, Chickering's seven

41

developmental vectors embody assumptions that may developmentally disadvantage LGB individuals. Because the early developmental tasks, or vectors, outlined by Chickering center around the development of interpersonal relationships and issues, LGB individuals may be unable to match peers in achieving competency in such trajectories as emotional expression and management, capacity for intimacy, and appreciation of difference. Immediate or "more pressing identity concerns related to safety, acceptance and belonging" (p. 19) may shadow or stall traditional conceptualizations of psychosocial development.

Psychosocial theories also include many identity development theories related to race, gender, faith and spirituality, and other aspects of students' selves, some of which have already been described in relation to their LGBT counterparts. Many of these are stage models that are adapted from Cross's (Skipper, 2005) model of African American Identity Development to meet the specific challenges or unique obstacles experienced by alternate identities (see Phinney, 1993 on ethnic identity formation; Josselson, 1987 on Women's identity development; Helms, 1990 on White identity formation).

A more recent contribution to the psychosocial framework is Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity. In this model, the individual is understood to be comprised of a set of core values, characteristics and attributes that are largely immutable. This core is orbited by a collection of evolving identities that exist in relation to one another as well as the core sense of self. One's core self and evolving identities are understood in the context of a family structure, a larger society, one's past experiences and current environment. This model takes into account the complexity of identity, the experience that many individuals have with resolving and understanding

42

themselves as a sum of conflicting, sometimes contradicting, identities. Further, it honors lived experience and self-determination.

Psychosocial theories are critical tools in assisting all students including those with LGBT identities. Yet cognitive development theories are valuable, as well. For instance, Perry's scheme of intellectual and ethical development was first published in 1970, and like Chickering's vectors, remains foundational in work with students. Perry's scheme describes nine phases through which students develop the ability to parse authority, determine an ethical course of action, and inform one's decisions based on one's commitment to his or her own values and beliefs, rather than on external influences. Perry notes that students develop or mature at different rates, and that intellectual and ethical development is unrelated to intelligence.

Fassinger (1998) proposes that developmental progress in cognitive and moral development, such as described by Perry (1970) may be aided by an LGB identity. Consider Perry's scheme whereby students move from seeing the world as dualistic, grounded in authority with clear rights and wrongs, to seeing the world as multiplistic, socially constructed with multiple realities and relativities. LGB students moving through the identity development process may be forced earlier to give up dualistic understandings for multiplistic ones as they "reconcile personal needs and desires with the (usually conflicting) demands of society" (p. 21).

Magolda (2004) took a different approach in understanding cognitive development as she developed and refined a theory of self-authorship over the last two decades. In Magolda's theory, students answer three questions during their developmental journey: "How do I know?" "Who am I?" and "How do I want to construct relationships

43

with others?" The space of intersection as each student answers these three questions becomes an inner voice, through which individuals make meaning of life and experiences.

Closely associated with cognitive development is moral reasoning, whose foundational theory was developed by Kohlberg (1984) using research conducted with white men of traditional college age. Kohlberg describes three levels of moral reasoning, where individuals are bound first, at the pre-conventional level by rules and expectations that are imposed externally by parents, teachers and society, for instance. As individuals develop in the conventional level, rules and expectations that were once external are adopted as one's own behavioral guides. Finally, at the post-conventional level it is the individual's own values and beliefs, one's core principals, that guide moral decision-making from an internal locus of control. A protégé of Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan (1977) criticized Kohlberg's theories for excluding the voices and experiences of women, and conducted her own studies on Women's moral reasoning, differentiating her findings from Kohlberg's by noting the masculine justice voice that grounded his work in contrast to the care voice that grounded hers. In Gilligan's reconceptualization, moral reasoning is characterized by values of equity, a focus on relationships and connectedness, and communication-based problem-solving.

The understanding and use of theories of college student development are essential to the work of providing spaces where students can learn, both about the curriculum and about themselves. Student affairs pioneer Esther Lloyd-Jones long advocated that students exist in wholeness, and that it is impossible for those who work with them to compartmentalize those efforts (Lloyd-Jones & Smith, 1954). The faculty

44

member, the coach, the residence director, the coordinator of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Student Services, each contributes to development of the student in his or her complexity, and must have the full range of abilities to understand and expedite that student towards resources and experiences that promote development.

In addition to theories that help scholars and practitioners to understand how students develop, theories are useful for helping to guide and interpret scholarship and practice itself, to reveal important aspects that culture attempts to obscure, or to provide a lens for analysis of contexts, experiences and events. Queer theory and QueerCrit provide theoretical opportunities of just this nature, and so discussion turns towards their consideration.

<div align="center">Queer Theory</div>

Queer theory rises from an interdisciplinary space of queer studies, cultural studies and women's studies and attempts to use gender and sexuality as a lens to deconstruct social meta-narratives. Pushing back against universal truths that frame concepts such as normativity and deviance, queer theory intends to read society and culture in ways that expose dominating and restricting institutions and structures. Queer theory attempts to understand power relationships, and to resist how power manifests in subjugation and objectification of some for the benefit of others. Queer theory also views identity as performative and unstable, disrupting categories and privileges grounded in social categorizations (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Abes & Kasch, 2007).

As an example of how queer theory can be applied to work with LGBT students, Abes and Kasch (2007) use a queer theory framework to interpret the experience of identity development, of becoming lesbian, as shared by a research participant. The

authors used the participant's reflections to create a queer theory narrative that explored intersections of her lesbian identity with her religious, socio-economic, and gender identities. This re-telling provided a richer, more explanatory narrative of the participant's experience than traditional student development or identity development theories had been able to accomplish. "Whereas self-authorship focuses on how students construct internal frameworks to navigate external influences, queer resistance focuses on how students deconstruct and reconstruct external influences," the authors noted, referring to Magolda's (2004) work, "Queer-authorship is the necessary deconstruction of heteronormativity that enables lesbian students to change the dominant social order in order to redefine the meaning of their multiple identities and the contexts in which their lives are situated" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 630; see also Abes, 2007).

The use of a queer theory lens in work with students may require that pathways for student development be understood less formally as progress made through pre-formed or pre-determined stages, and that more attention be given to the ways that students resist developmental and environmental constraints, or push back to re-shape those educational contexts in forms that are less heteronormative. Further, the attention that queer theory gives to awareness of power relations may inspire practitioners to more carefully "consider how they establish, maintain, and share power in relationships with students" (Abes & Kasch, 2007, p. 634). This may create discomfort or discontinuity for institutional agents who are engaged in working with students whose developmental needs or social agendas place them at odds with or in resistance to the cultural norms and expectations that educators, administrators and all those in between are invested (externally or internally) in reproducing.

46

Along with a Queer Theory lens, an important framework for discussion is that of microaggressions. Largely gaining traction in research and literature of the last decade, the phenomenon of microaggressions, or everyday indignities the degrade, humiliate or communicate hostility (Nadal et al., 2011), may be the most common form of resistance to full campus participation experienced among underrepresented campus constituencies. Therefore, an analysis of the phenomenon is worthy of careful discussion as a theoretical framework in understanding the roles and potentials of LGBT Centers.

<div align="center">Microaggressions</div>

Much of the theoretical and practical work of Centers is tied closely to the ways that underrepresented members of the campus community experience the campus climate, with an emphasis on the role that microaggressions play in perpetuating spaces hostile to people of color, women, members of the LGBT community and other non-majority groups. It is important to have a thorough understanding of microaggressions as a unique and pervasive phenomena in society at large, and on campuses, specifically. The following analysis will: define and categorize microaggressions; explain how microaggressions create psychological dilemmas for those who experience them, and posit a process model for how recipients of microaggressions respond to them; argue that microaggressions have significant detrimental health and emotional consequences for their targets; and differentiate the ways that microaggressions manifest differently based on identity-affiliation. Finally, discussion will turn to the value of counterspaces as social and cultural buffers that mitigate the effects of oppression.

Defining And Categorizing Microaggressions

Over the last decade, Derald Wing Sue has become a preeminent scholar and expert on microaggressions, their effects and strategies for responding to them. In his 2010 book, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation*, Sue classifies microaggressions in a number of helpful ways, thinking first about the historical decline in majority acceptance of truly overt acts of hatred and intolerance. Without dismissing the reality that these acts and their antecedent attitudinal frameworks still exist among considerable numbers, the vast majority find them reprehensible. Far more insidious, posits Sue, is the power incumbent in the everyday microaggressions that are consciously and unconsciously meted out by well-intended and "generally decent" (p. 22) people, and "occur spontaneously without any checks and balances in personal, social, and work-related interactions" (p. 40).

The author describes microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (p. 24) bounded by characteristics such as race, gender, gender identity, sexual-orientation, religious belief, ability, socio-economic status, etc. Readers are invited to consider invisible messages that are both verbal and non-verbal, as well as delivered environmentally. Sue (2010) posits a taxonomy that captures these microaggressions across three categories: "microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. All three forms may vary on the dimension of awareness and intentionality by the perpetrator, but they all communicate either an overt, covert, or hidden offensive message or meaning to recipients" (p. 28). The taxonomy also describes a dozen Themes that characterize microaggression messages, such as Ascription of Intelligence, which describes an

48

interaction wherein a majority person compliments the intelligence of a marginalized person, such as a White presidential contender commenting on how "articulately" an African American candidate presents himself. The implicit offensive message is that the person is an exception to their race, with other members generally presenting as unintelligent and inarticulate.

Psychological Dilemmas

Sue (2010) describes how four major psychological dilemmas may come into play when individuals experience microaggressions. The first is a clash of racial realities, by which the author describes a significant disparity in the lived experiences of Americans as distinguished by racial group. While Whites largely inhabit a consciousness free of racial considerations, People of Color find that many or most of their experiences are filtered through the lens of racial identity. Because race plays such a fundamental role in the experiences of people of color, for instance, "hypervigilance in discerning the motives, attitudes, and the often unintentional biased contradictions of White Americans is perceived by marginalized groups not as 'paranoia,' but rather as functional survival skills" (p. 47).

A second dilemma is the invisibility of unintentional biases. The author notes that a recent shift in the manifestation of bias is consistent with its expression as a failure to provide assistance rather than an overt attempt to hurt. It is difficult to measure such omissions, but Sue (2010) relates a number of research projects that reinforce the likelihood of majority group members to offer assistance to members of their own group, but deny it to others.

49

Diminishing the harm of microaggressions is a third psychological dilemma. Skeptics claim that attending to microaggressions gives importance to trivial or harmless slights or insults. The author refutes this position by citing a significant evidentiary literature that supports the range of psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences that accompany microaggressions (Sue, 2010).

Rounding out the four, Sue (2010) emphasizes that for many of those who experience microaggressions, how to respond becomes a psychological dilemma in itself. Referring to the dilemma colloquially as a "Catch-22" the author posits both positive and negative factors that weigh into the action of responding to a microaggression as well as the inaction of shrugging one off.

"It is safe to say that potential microaggressive incidents set in motion a chain of events that may be energy-depleting and/or disruptive to cognitive, emotional and behavioral domains" (Sue, 2010, p. 82). The Microaggression Process Model describes five phases through which recipients of microaggressive experiences may work through both the incidents and their consequences. Detailing that the microaggression message may be conveyed verbally, non-verbally, environmentally or behaviorally, the first phase attempts to frame and theme common meta-messages and hidden assumptions that are conveyed intentionally or unintentionally by members of power groups. Phase two describes the initial processing of a received microaggression, as the recipient comes to terms with her or his perceptions that an experience contains a microaggressive component. Because "microaggressions are often ambiguous, filled with double messages, and subtle in their manifestations" (p. 72), Sue (2010) emphasizes that recipients often question whether or not a particular experience should be characterized

as microaggressive through a process of mental and emotional rumination about incidents.

The process of questioning and coming to terms with one's experience and perception gives way to the third phase of reaction, that "represents an inner struggle that evokes strong cognitive, behavioral, and emotional reactions" (p. 73). The reaction process may be characterized by one of several common responses: Healthy paranoia, sanity self-checking, empowerment and self-validation, and rescuing offenders.

Interpreting and making meaning of the experience is the fourth phase of the model, whereby recipients come to understand the experience as consistent with larger cultural and social structures and meta-messages, such as those that convey that racial minorities don't belong, are intellectually inferior, are untrustworthy, or all the same, for instance. Finally, the fifth phase describes four largely psychological outcomes that are experienced as consequences of microaggressions: powerlessness, invisibility, forced compliance or loss of integrity, and pressure to represent one's group.

The model's phases "may occur in a different order, overlap with one another, be cyclical and/or interact in a more complex manner" (p. 82) than the linear structure in which they are presented. As a lens for understanding, from beginning to end, the experience of microaggression, the model seems both credible and intuitively accurate. However, more research and evidence is needed to support that it conforms to and confirms the experiences of recipients of microaggressions across racial, gender, sexual orientation and other domains of oppression.

Health and Emotional Consequences

In making the case for the significance of microaggressive stressors on the lives

and health of their recipients, Sue (2010) uses two well-established models that describe

the impact of stress on biological and psychological systems. First, the General

Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) Model developed in 1956 by Selye is used to describe how

organisms defend against illness through three stages: alarm, adaptation or resistance, and

exhaustion. Similarly, in De La Fuente's work with earthquake survivors, he developed

the Crisis Decompensation Model (CDM) to describe common reactions to

psychologically stressful events, similarly in three stages: impact, attempted resolution,

and decompensated adjustment. Both GAS and CDM models describe a period of initial

bewilderment or alarm, a responsive period where the affected attempt to cope with a

new normal, and the consequences evoked if adaptation is unsuccessful.

Sue (2010) argues that microaggressive stressors, experienced as a cumulative,

frequent series of individual minor slights, ultimately have the potential to affect the

recipient with crisis-level volumes of stress resulting in life-depleting biological,

emotional, cognitive and behavioral consequences. "Microaggressions are linked to a

wider sociopolitical context of oppression and injustice that results in a soul wound

passed on from generation to generation of those who understand their own histories of

discrimination and prejudice (Sue, 2003)" (p. 95). Microaggressions are so insidious

because of the very predictable ways that they eat away at recipients' core identities,

leaving behind physical exhaustion and depleted immune capacity, reduced self-esteem

and quality of life, cognitive disruption and mental fatigue, and adaptive and maladaptive

behavioral patterns.

Differing Manifestations Of Identity-Affiliated Microaggressions

After considering the ways that microaggressions are understood and manifest broadly, as well as upon the physical and mental health of individual targets, Sue (2010) turns to consider racial, gender and sexual orientation microaggressions independent from one another through a series of three individual treatments. While racism, sexism, genderism, heterosexism and homophobia can be understood as a network of interconnected oppressions, the ways that microaggressions are experienced by people of color is vastly different than sexual orientation-based microaggressions or gender-based microaggressions. The independent treatments that the author provides for each identity category provide critical differentiation and illumination.

Grounding his comments in the rise of modern racism, or those that "operate in such a manner as to preserve the nonprejudiced self-image of Whites by offering them convenient rationalizations for their actions" (p. 145), rather than overt acts of intolerance or extreme hatred, Sue (2010) asserts that racial microaggressions are characterized by context-dependent reactions that are many times unintentional and unconscious. The author describes contexts of situational or ideological ambiguity as examples of moments when microaggressions are likely to manifest as, for example, a failure to provide assistance rather than to intend harm. Another example is the shrouding of race-dependent attitudes in, for example, tenets of ideological conservatism or cultural meritocracy. These constant and cumulative slights and harms result in damaging health consequences, both physical and mental. Rather than lumping racial identities together, Sue appropriately considers the microaggressive impact of African-Americans, Latino/as, Asian Americans and Native Americans, drawing on each's social, cultural and historical

positioning to explain how microaggressions are experienced uniquely within each racial categorization.

In considering the ways that female-bodied persons are the subjects of microaggression, Sue (2010) similarly acknowledges historical sexism, grounded in patriarchy, power and control, before describing its modern consequent, "characterized by denial of personal bias and prejudice toward women, a general conscious belief in equality of the sexes, but unconscious attitudes that foster nonsupport for programs and legislation helpful to women" (p. 168). The author describes nine insidious and pervasive types of microaggressions, from a denial of the reality of sexism or assumption of inferiority to sexist language and invisibility. Finally, the detrimental impact of sex- and gender-based microaggressions, including its impact on womens' standard of living, anxiety and stress, and body image, dissatisfaction and eating disorders are discussed at length.

Sue's (2010) treatment of sexual-orientation based microaggressions follows a similar pattern, discussing the marginalization of LGB persons to remain closeted, encounter identity conflicts and confusion grounded in social messaging and values, experience internalized oppression, and encounter social and cultural invisibility. As with gender, the author articulates a series of ways that LGB persons encounter microaggressions, such as through oversexualization, the assumption of pathology or abnormality and heteronormativity, among others. Turning to harms, Sue discusses how microaggressions injure LGB persons by reinforcing secrecy, creating sexual stigmatization, disrupting identity development and contributing to mental distress.

While studies have been published for some time regarding the experience of race-based microaggressions on campus (Grier-Reed, 2010; Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009), little work has been done regarding microaggressions as they relate to LGBT students. Nadal et al. (2011) provide evidence of microaggressions in the everyday lives of their participants through research with 26 students and professionals. Eight themes, such as the use of heterosexist terminology, exoticization, and denial of the reality of heterosexism, and the experience of threatening behavior, emerged from participants' responses and corresponded with understandings of microaggression.

Sorely missing in Sue's analysis is a similar treatment of microaggressions grounded in the expression of gender or transgender experiences. However, the examples and consequences that are discussed at length represent a sound and eminently useful treatment, and will serve to extend and invite further analysis for identity groups discussed, as well as those unconsidered. Articles that explored the experiences of transgender participations were similarly unavailable in the published literature.

The Value of Counterspaces

Yosso and Lopez (2010) use a Critical Race Theory lens to analyze the ways that campus cultural centers serve as counterspaces that buffer students from the culture shock that accompanies their arrival on campuses, that assists in the development of Communities of Color that foster resilience and persistence, and facilitate the navigation that students experience between their communities of origin and the campus. Positing that the inclusion of minorities on college campus is borne, not from institutional attempts to seek socially just recompense for the social exclusion of people of color from campuses through history, or their support in the creation and maintenance of hegemonic

structures of oppression, but rather grow out of interest convergence and the goal of creating multi-layered, value-added learning environments that best prepare majority white students to function optimally in a global workforce.

Thus students find themselves situated on campuses that actively resist them through hostile environments that embody a "gendered racism" that questions their "physical presence, academic merits, and cultural knowledge" (Yosso & Lopez, 2010, p. 84) and demand social conformity and acquiescence in exchange for grudging tolerance. As counterspaces and sites of resistance, campus culture centers shift the narrative focus to the educational stories and experiences of marginalized people who are most directly served by their missions. These centers engage in "'everyday actions' that 'validate [students'] sense of dignity and worth' (Caldwell, 1995, p. 276)" and mitigate the impact of microaggressions that attempt the converse.

Solorzano, Ceja and Yosso (2000) posit a model of campus racial climate whereby the creation of counterspaces is an outgrowth of students' experience and response to a hostile environment that marginalizes underrepresented students and subjects them to a constant barrage of microaggressions in academic and social contexts. These pervasive everyday indignities, slights and acts of disregard are designed to remind marginalized students of their inferiority and secondary status, and the cumulative experience of them wears down and exhausts their targets and results in considerable negative emotional, physical and spiritual consequences.

In response, people at the margins often come together for mutual comfort and support. Members engage in sharing of common experiences and in validating one another's experience of oppression. This can serve to buffer the impact of

56

microaggressions, and foster the development of individual and collective strategies that bolster resistance and resilience. Ultimately these counterspaces, constituted as formal or informal associations—for instance, class- or major-related groups, student organizations or institutional structures such as culture centers or ethnic studies curricula—serve as "an important strategy for minority students' academic survival" (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000, p. 71) and institutional persistence.

Case and Hunter (2012) considered the ways that counterspaces support and foster adaptive responses to oppression. Adaptive responses are enacted by oppressed persons in purposeful ways to mitigate, ameliorate and resist the psychological trauma of social marginalization. These strategies can be individual, such as confronting or avoiding acts of intolerance; interpersonal, as when individuals seek communities of support or settings that empower them; or that draw on social change and social activism.

Engagement within counterspaces, or social spheres where stereotypic and deficit notions of marginalized peoples are challenged and replaced by positive group concepts and a supportive climate, can be formally organized or develop organically. In both cases, they serve as "living repositories of collective experiences and wisdom that can inform the everyday strategies through which marginalized individuals navigate oppressive contexts" (p. 266).

Case and Hunter (2012) described three "general domains of challenging processes" (p. 262) that characterize counterspaces: narrative identity work, acts of resistance and direct relational transactions. The identity work that takes place in counterspaces includes the replacement of social meta-narratives that are demeaning and devaluing with alternative stories that express lived experiences and "envision and craft

positive and affirming personal identities" (p. 265). Acts of resistance are also engaged through counterspaces, as group members enact and embody shared cultural practices and express identity without fear of ostracism. Finally, direct relational transactions take place in counterspaces, as group members engage with one another to provide mutual support, a sense of security and to "foster a sense of 'fictive kinship'" (p. 266). Through these interactions, participants "use their experiences and knowledge to model or otherwise instruct each other in cognitive and behavioral strategies to respond to oppression" (p. 266).

While calling for more research on the ways that counterspaces help marginalized people resist oppressive structures, the authors also noted that additional consideration needs to be given to the ways that people with multiple marginalized identities engage effectively or are supported in counterspaces that represent their identity and experiences less than fully.

Describing an intentional community of support for Black and African American students on a large predominantly white campus, the author posited that the African American Student Network functions as a counterspace in which "students are free to express their authentic selves and feel heard and validated versus stereotyped and judged" (p. 187). Developed on a humanistic framework, the network both attends to the whole person and contributes to strong interpersonal relationships that spring from empathy and the understanding of experience subjectively (Grier-Reed, 2010).

In weekly group meetings, student, faculty and staff participants speak their minds and co-create a discussion that attends to questions or concerns raised by their lived experience, often around shared experiences of microaggression and

58

marginalization. As a counterspace, AFAM serves as a sanctuary where members compare experiences and understandings to make sense of whether and how they have experienced bias, receive support and are validated in their understandings of interpersonal interactions, and critique responses to microaggressions and strategize alternatives. In its fifth year, the network fosters strong student involvement and the authors suggest that participation is driven by students' increases in outcomes such as "safety, connectedness, validation, resilience, intellectual stimulation, empowerment and a home base on campus" (Grier-Reed, 2010, p. 187).

Citing the considerable identity-related climate obstacles that confront first-generation Latino students at a large, predominantly white, public research university, Nunez argued that ethnic studies courses serve as counterspaces that contribute to student persistence. By encountering and connecting with faculty who affirm their cultural backgrounds, developing intellectual tools and capacity that foster responses to racism, growing their personal awareness of community and family, and fostering empathic responses, students in her study were able to improve their classroom diversity experiences and reduce feelings of academic and social isolation and mitigate the effects of campus marginalization. Further, the author pushed back on presumptions that courses and curricula which explore identity and culture tend to or are intended to separate and divide peers around group membership, providing evidence that such courses instead enhance and encourage overall college engagement, and contribute to other important social and academic outcomes (Nunez, 2011).

Alternatively, Huber and Cueva (2012) considered the primary and secondary educational experiences of Latinos through a CRT/LatCrit lens. Drawing on examples of

59

school-based microaggressions grounded in racial nativism, the authors posit the essential

value of students' involvement in educational and social counterspaces that "provided a

sense of belonging and empowerment where students demonstrated resilience to the

subordination they faced in schools" (p. 403). Further, the authors used a form of

narrative discourse, *testimonio*, to both interrogate the experience of microaggression and

resistance, but also to foster individual reflection and healing from these psychological,

emotional and spiritual wounds.

Through a case study analysis of UCLA's Raza Womyn, a student organization of

queer/Latina women committed to dismantling oppressions of all types, Revilla (2010)

built on the resistance framework developed by Freire through the examination of

"strategies used by students to create not only safe spaces but also 'counterspaces' of

resistance within academia–that is, spaces in which they are actively resisting mainstream

perspectives, particularly those that uphold white supremacist, imperialist, patriarchal,

heteronormative, and citizenist ideologies" (p. 39). Counterspaces serve as social buffers

that ease and mitigate the pain that accompanies engagement in oppressive contexts. As a

long term ethnographic study, this work is differentiated from other explorations of

counterspace in that its subject of analysis is an intersectional community of queer

Latinas attempting to engage in the practice of multidimensional consciousness, or a

community committed to the struggle for social justice and the development of skills and

consciousness individually and collectively required to attain it without unintentionally

reproducing inequalities in the quest to create this desired social change.

Revilla's (2010) participants spoke enthusiastically about how their affiliation

with Raza Womyn was transformational, life changing and indispensable. As a

counterspace, the organization functioned to foster belonging, community, skill development, resilience and meaningful engagement. Further, it did so in a way that other campus groups that might have served as counterspaces (coalescing around a single identity characteristic or cultural association) were unable to match because their resistance to oppression in one form was accompanied by the perpetuation of oppressive structures in another. In part, the author suggests that this organization's serious commitment to changing the world and social activism functioned just as importantly to change the lives of the women who took part in it, and that "student activism and critical consciousness serve as a means of survival for many marginalized students at historically and predominantly white institutions of higher education" (p. 57).

Schwartz (2014) studied the experiences of young men of color in a GED attainment program, and the ways that their educational experiences were different in this counterspace than in more traditional learning environments that they had experienced. Previous schooling contexts had been characterized by violence, verbal abuse and verbal assault, rundown facilities and a lack of resources, and rules that enforced minor personal regulation and compliance rather than attending to overt acts of cruelty and misbehavior that fostered unsafe environments and hampered learning.

The author used spacial analysis to describe a counterspace created by the program that attended to the learning environment–literally the space in which learning took place–as well as the relationships that fostered and encouraged learning within subjects and of life and relational skills that encouraged human growth and development of the participants. The counterspace that was developed specifically allowed participants to use the process of degree attainment to engage in self-understanding through a

historical and curricular lens, the creation of community and interpersonal relationships that supported resistance and resilience to a shared oppressive social context, and as a space of reflection and healing. The feeling of this structured and cultivated counterspace, in which the participants were co-creators, was described as one of support, safety and family (Schwartz, 2014).

Reviews of identity and student development theory have provided a context for the experiences and unique challenges of LGBTQ+ students on campus, Queer Theory and QueerCrit provide a unique lens through which to examine institutional responsibilities for providing a fully realized educational experience for all students, and discussion of microaggressions helps to reveal the insidiousness of bias. Now examination of the literature leads to consideration of culture centers, how they came to be on campuses, the populations they serve and support, and existing evidence of Center efficacy.

Culture Centers

The most current literature around culture centers can be considered in two parts. The first discusses the value of centers: the degree to which centers are harmful or beneficial, and most recently, discussions regarding whether campuses are better served by individual culture centers that seek to meet the needs of student identities bounded by race, gender, sexual orientation or other characteristics, versus omnibus multicultural centers that centralize outreach to multiple identity groups simultaneously and perhaps gain efficiencies in the process. The second part considers the roles and efficacy of existing centers through a variety of methodologies. I will provide a synthesis of both parts in order.

The Value of Culture Centers

There has always been strong resistance to the formation and presence of culture centers, from their origins, and the first efforts of Black students on predominantly white campuses to demand additional support and sanctuary as a function of the Black Student Movement in the late 1960s and 70s (Patton, 2006b). Dominant narratives continue to posit the dispensability of culture centers through a variety of arguments. Consideration will be given to the most persistent arguments, along with counter-narratives framed by the principles of CRT and its variants.

The tendency of cultural centers to divide. Administrators argued that the establishment of ethnic enclaves would lead to division in the student body, separating whites from non-whites in the face of new laws that had struck down patterns of segregation nationally (Princes, 1994). Renn (2011) considers more recent iterations of the argument, which frames the concern of Student of Color self-segregation as detrimental to the diverse interaction goals that institutions have for all students, but more specifically for the benefit of majority students, since Students of Color have no choice but to live, attend class and spend considerable time interacting with majority peers. Her reframing of this paradigm is informed by a paradox of the Millennial generation. While a very diverse cohort, they have experienced an educationally context more segregated than that of their parents and grandparents. "This is a generation of students who want to believe differences have been overcome, but they lack the intercultural skills necessary to level the playing field. Identity centers are physical representations of this paradox" (p. 247).

The limited scope of culture center benefits. Others use equity arguments to resist the implementation of Black Culture Centers, arguing that university funds gathered from all students should not be restricted to provide for the support of just a few, or that the institutional benefits of cultural centers are not sufficient to justify the costs. The staffing and budget resources devoted to the support of culture centers for the express purpose of facilitating the educational experience of a limited proportion of the campus community are highlighted as inequitable.

Yet a CRT lens that places marginalized students at the center of the conversation would point out that many of the support positions that exist at the university target White students exclusively or nearly exclusively. For instance, Fraternity and Sorority programs, and Student Activities offerings often fail to significantly engage non-white students or garner the interest and attendance of marginalized students. Yet these programs are not called out for their adherence to the support of primarily White students in the way that culture centers, while open to all, are often considered limiting because they are largely accessed by Students of Color or other marginalized student groups (Patton, 2011).

Further, the CRT principle of interest convergence would point out that the existence of cultural centers, and some might argue their very establishment, hinges on the centers' benefits to the institution in terms of student pacification at the time of their origins, and ongoing benefits to the admission and retention of underrepresented students and other diversity related strategic goals (Patton, 2006b).

The social focus of culture centers. Still others argued that the purpose of cultural centers are aligned with social rather than educational outcomes. Detractors point to a variety of social activities promoted on campus and sponsored by culture centers, such as dances, movie nights, and performances, or to spaces within centers, such as lounges with TVs that gather students together for informal interaction.

Yet those who make use of centers provide significant counter-narratives including programming that provides for direct academic support including direct linkages with academic units and the instructional mission (Renn, 2011), peer, professional and alumni mentorship (Lazano, 2010), and leadership development (Lazano, 2010; Patton, 2006a). The argument also ignores that the high level cognitive work of learning is best accomplished in the context of social affirmation and acceptance. Students whose existence is characterized by outsiderness and a lack of belonging or feeling understood, are less likely to meet and exceed their academic potential. Where majority students have a better time of fitting into a campus structured to support them, underrepresented students seek supportive counterspace and refuge from daily experiences of microaggressions. Culture centers serve a critical and meaningful role as spaces of social sanctuary. "Identity centers create buffers against microaggressions and other negative aspects of campus climate. They form counterspaces for and by students who share identities" (Renn, 2011).

The perceived social parity or institutional success of some identity groups. Another argument against the continued support of some centers is grounded in social gains made by some groups that place them at or closer to parity with majority groups, such as in the case of gays and lesbians. Arguments are also made that identity groups

65

that achieve academic success that corresponds to peers, such as Asian-Americans, have less need for additional institutional support (Liu et al., 2010).

Yet the everyday experience of underrepresented students is not entirely characterized by media representation or identity group persistence. For example, national polling on gay marriage indicates growing social acceptance of gay and lesbians, however a comprehensive national study reflects that over one third of LGBT respondents experienced individual acts of harassment in the previous year (Rankin, 2003). And while cultural values and expectations within Asian-American traditions may push students towards classroom achievement, there are still significant gaps in achievement and persistence between different Asian ethnicities. Further, simple measures of achievement and persistence fail to account for value-added institutional outcomes related to personal and leadership development, for instance (Liu et al., 2010).

The push for a multicultural model. Still others argue that supporting multiple individual centers, each catering to the needs of a particular identity group is inefficient. These detractors point to models of unified multicultural centers that meet the diversity needs of an evolving student body. They point to divisiveness that can take root between groups who feel disproportionately supported, to centers that have strayed from their original missions and purposes, or that fail to live up to their promise.

It is important to unpack the idea of substituting omnibus multicultural centers for individual units grounded in unique group identities. But first, a CRT lens would consider these latter arguments as examples of deficit thinking, or the tendency for the dominant to blame the marginalized for not overcoming institutionalized obstacles to their achievement (Patton, 2006b). For example, identity-based competitiveness exists in a

66

space where resources have been bounded, such that individual groups' reasonable requests for support are passed over or dismissed in favor of other dominant-determined outcomes. Identity-based groups then look to compete with one another for resources already allocated to the support of the underprivileged. Yet the system is structured by the institution, and the solution is in the hands of institutional decision-makers. Putting the responsibility back on underrepresented students is a clever sleight of hand.

Similarly, centers that find that their mission has strayed, or who are unable to meet the outcomes expected of them, often find themselves in a similar resource bind. Expectations placed on units by controlling or supervising units are often met without additional increases in staffing or support. Culture centers and their staffs are expected to make due and make it work at existing levels. As such, administrative prioritization takes place, with the most important or valued goals taking precedence over others. This is not the fault of centers or center staffs, but is again a management outcome that must be resolved at the level of institutional decision-making and resource allocation.

Princes (1994) frames a discussion of the pressure to shift Black Culture Centers to Multicultural Centers in terms of an expanding minority population, drawing ever more diverse constituencies onto campus, and specifically predominantly white campuses. In an effort to meet this expanding demand for attention and support, some have called for Black Culture Centers to expand their missions to attend to a broader range of social injustices and attempt to meet the needs of varied constituencies.

The author cautions that this trajectory is both divisive and precarious, and belies a complexity that is too rarely unpacked and thoroughly examined. Focusing the same existing resources on an expanding and more complex problem has the potential to lead

67

only to a more superficial understanding of oppression and issues of social justice, and do little good to the Black students whose engagement with a rich and varied historical tradition is diminished, as well as to students of other underrepresented ethnicities who may be served by Center staff who have no firm grounding or lived experience in the cultures they seek to affirm. Rather than focusing on the existence of units that attempt a sort of cultural panacea in the face of majority resistance, the author contends that resources appropriate to meeting the needs of recruited and administered minorities must be committed to their support, and also for shifting the attitudes and cultural climate of institutions away from dominant norms to a more inclusive and multicultural ethos.

Yet Princes' (1994) conversation was a pre-curser to a tension that would continue to press forward in the next decade and beyond. Black issues in higher education would report on the same growing pressure on campuses to transition centers that have historically served Black students to grow their missions.

Positing that Black Culture Centers are standing on shaky ground and potentially have outlived their usefulness, Hefner (2002) describes a trend away from the establishment and support of culture centers historically committed to the support of Black students to a model of multicultural centers that attempt to serve various underrepresented populations simultaneously. The historical meaning of Black Culture Centers and their success in helping Black students navigate social and academic obstacles to be successful on predominantly White campuses has led to a growing tension about their value and efficacy. Campuses with long histories of particular Centers that have attempted to shift or restructure a Center's mission towards a broader definition of Culture have experienced pushback from students, faculty, alumni and community. Yet a

decline in institutional resources and growing populations of diverse underrepresented students create a political climate where re-visioning these Centers can feel attractive to administrators and others who feel institutionally disenfranchised.

Patton (2010) pushes back against Hefner's (2002) assertions and this growing dominant discourse of the declining relevance, departure from mission, and general failure of Black Culture Centers to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse pool of students. Using case study examples drawn from a qualitative study of Black Culture Centers, Patton discusses two centers that play "an important and unique role in their respective campus communities" (Patton, 2010, p. 73). Addressing major criticisms that centers serve a primarily social purpose and fail to involve non-Black students, these examples discuss vibrant, contemporary programs that:

> Offer educational programming to teach students about Black history and culture, and have been successful in involving students of various races, ethnicities, and cultures. At the [Center for Black Studies at Northern Illinois University], the courses are a draw not only for Black students but also for students who need to complete general course requirements or have interest in pursuing the minor. Moreover, the interdisciplinary nature of the courses is attractive to a diverse array of students. At the [Malcolm X Institute at Wabash College], the associate member program fosters brotherhood, leadership, involvement, and identity development. The programs not only provide academic benefits to students but also usher in opportunities for involvement and leadership experiences (Patton, 2010, p. 73).

Telling the stories of these culture centers, and examining critical narratives that do the same for others is essential, Patton (2010) asserts, "to highlight the solid ground upon which many BCCs stand in order to challenge deficit thinking about their existence" (p. 66). The following section attempts to meet Patton's challenge by examining research on the roles and efficacy of cultural centers generally, and then largely considers those

serving Black students, Women, other students with underrepresented racial identities, and finally LGBT students.

The Roles and Efficacy of Culture Centers

While conversations about the value of culture centers continue, some empirical research is being done on the roles that centers play, and their success in meeting student and institutional needs. Several studies have considered cultural centers generally, or the success of centers on a campus in meeting the needs of students.

In considering whether four cultural centers located on the campus of Western American University meet the diversity needs of students, Bramley (2009) found that while Center staff and students valued diversity and provided and engaged in diversity programming, much of the activity took place among first-year students, with diminished participation in diversity activities and conversations among upper-division students. Further, Bramley found that among students who identified with a culture center associated identity, some balkanization was characteristic of their student experience, and students were less likely to branch out and seek participation in additional non-Center related organizations and activities. Yet students did report feeling supported and welcomed in cultural center spaces, and attributed their success, in some cases, to center involvement.

A second study used a case study methodology to explore the value of three culture centers at the University of California, San Diego, and found that the centers there "promoted a sense of personal validation and belonging for underrepresented and marginalized students" (p. 123). Participants in the study reflected that Center

involvement became a bridge that helped engender feelings of belonging and decreased isolation and disconnectedness with the larger university community.

While these studies consider the impact of multiple centers on large university campuses, others narrow the focus of examination to a center serving a specific marginalized cohort, or population with unique needs. A range of these sorts of studies have taken place, and will be examined. This examination will first consider Black Culture Centers, which were among those first established on college campuses, Women's Centers and others targeting gender, additional centers grounded in racial identity, a recently established center serving veterans, before finally considering existing research on aspects of LGBT Centers.

Research on Black Culture Centers. In a historical article that would set the mission and agenda for Black Culture Centers for decades, Durley (1969) proposes that conditions on predominantly White campuses inadequately meet the needs of Black students or prepare them to contribute meaningfully to Black communities post-graduation. He posits that the establishment of Black Culture Centers could help to facilitate a positive self-concept for Black students, and to counter the cultural messages that they receive about their inferiority and inability to succeed in campus academic and social millues.

The author envisions centers as spaces that: reinforce the rich heritage and traditions characteristic of Black history and society; help students to overcome the transition to predominantly White educational environments; help students balance engagement in the campus without experiencing identity assimilation; provide academic support, remediation and tutoring as necessary; provide points of contact with college

staff that can relate to students as fellow Black people; and provide assistance with vocational placement.

In a relatively short period, Durley's (1969) vision of Black Culture Centers would be fought for and made real by students on a variety of campuses, often in the face of resistance from reluctant administrators, and those centers would perform the very work outlined in this article. By 2006, the number of campus Black Culture Centers would top 450, and the mission and purposes for their existence would far exceed Durley's call to action (Patton, 2006a). Yet by the early 1990s, tensions around Black Culture Centers and questions about their ability to meet an expanding range of student and campus needs were beginning to grow.

Using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, Patton (2006b) tells the story of the Black Culture Center at the University of Florida by interviewing and compiling the voices of students, with the goal of empirically substantiating assertions posited in the literature regarding the positive impact of such centers for Black students. Suggestions that Black Culture Centers help to facilitate identity development, serve as counter-spaces, contribute to a more positive campus racial climate, enhance retention, and provide students with counter-strategies to overcome social and academic obstacles, are supported by very little evidence, however Patton's interviews with 11 Black students from varying class years begin a process whereby said claims are shown to be more credible.

Through careful analysis of interviews, historical documents and archives and observations, Patton (2006b) describes four major themes that emerged in her qualitative phenomenological case study: a campus climate characterized by covert racism, apathy,

and racial polarization; the ways that students learn about the Black Culture Center and the formation of impressions; how they use the Center; and the need for continuation of the Center's activities.

More important than the findings however, for this researcher, was Patton's (2006b) unusual care and detail in describing her theoretical framework of CRT, and carefully linking it to every aspect of the study, as well as her clear and concise methodology, both of which considerably inform this author's own research path.

Research on Women's Centers and others targeting gender. Highlighting the influx of diverse women to college campuses, Buford (1988) reinforces that the missions of campus women's centers must embrace the intersectionality of identity. Identities multiply grounded in race, age, faith, parenthood and relationship status, and class, influence women to experience their genderedness in unique and meaningful ways. Women's Center mission outcomes, such as educational programming, support, facilitated communication, and institutional advocacy must be reflective of these diverse women and their lived experiences. Buford suggests that a Center's mission and activities should be constructed through the lens of identity development theory. In the case of the CSU Dominguez Hills, programs are selected annually to align with each stage of Sue's (1981) Minority Consciousness Development Theory. An additional strategy for success incorporates the voices and efforts of the women it serves "to help design the services of the Center [which] validates their knowledge" (p. 34). A program that draws on the diversity of its constituency provides a broad range of offerings, critical ownership of the Center's goals by those involved, and shared investment in the Center's success.

Conducted in 1999-2000, Kasper's (2004) comprehensive survey of 75 campus Women's Centers captured information about the ways centers are administered, structured and resourced. Just more than half of responding centers reported full-time directors, while the remainder draw leadership from part-time or shared-time staff, graduate student directors or configurations of volunteers. Predictably, director salaries spanned the low to mid five figures. Some variation in leadership and salary was evident between public and private institutions, but the study did not indicate statistical significance related to these differences.

Responding centers reported diverse funding sources, such as direct funds from the institution, funding as part of student affairs or another unit, student fees, work-study, endowment funding, and grants or gifts. Just over half of the centers reported a need for additional funds to meet or expand mission goals, including funds to support additional staff, physical space, computers, programming resources, and infrastructure costs. It was noted by the author that surprisingly few centers were directly aligned or associated with academic Women's Studies departments on their campus. This distance or tension between the two areas was most often attributed to Departments' political need to maintain academic and institutional credibility as faculty distinct from staff.

An outcome of considerable interest in my work was the ways that centers provided institutional justification for their existence to administrators or other sources of funding. While a third of centers reported no such pressure to make a case for their continued campus role, an additional third "kept statistics, produced annual reports, and conducted surveys and needs assessments to document the use of an need for the centers' services and programs" (p. 496). Many units include essential educational programming,

such as that dealing with relationship violence, sexual assault, eating disorders, and sexual harassment, as a means of providing the campus with an indispensable service. Others spoke of maintaining visibility through programming, and "underscoring the fact that their center contributed to a positive campus climate by meeting otherwise unmet needs of at least half of the campus population" (p 496).

Finally, the article discusses obstacles to the success of centers. The primary obstacle identified was funding, followed by attitudes towards feminism, the belief among campus constituents that gender equity has been largely achieved, apathy, time available to meet mission goals, visibility, tensions with administrators, and poorly attended center events.

Byrne (2000) posits that the goals of feminist pedagogy, such as to "awaken students to the oppression of women and other minority groups; to engage students in active discussion; to put teaching into the context of students' lives and experience, and to empower students with the understanding that knowledge is not neutral" (p. 48) are often best achieved when students apply feminist theory in out-of-class contexts. Linking the activities of the Women's Studies curriculum and those of the Women's Center creates a layered and dynamic teaching atmosphere that engages students in social action, advocacy and empowerment. The author provides examples of a range of collaborations, such as campus events and campus-sponsored conferences that seek praxis, campus reading groups grounded in feminist writing and theory, lecture series that address issues of gender and its intersectionalities, and other programming that engages in the celebration and support of Women and Women's cultures.

75

Pointing to the declining proportion of undergraduate degrees earned by men versus their female counterparts, and research that shows that within the elementary and secondary pipeline, girls get better grades, have higher educational aspirations, and are more involved with college preparation activities, Osbourne (2010) posits that this "boys crisis" (p. 5) opens a space in the academe for specific supports targeted towards the development of male students. Osbourne's study focused on The Center for Men's Leadership and Service, situated at St. John's University, an all-male Benedictine college. The center engages men around issues of men's health, relationship violence and sexual assault, alcohol use, gendered conflict, male socialization and the development of men's identities. Students report that center involvement allows them to set aside their hyper-masculinity and engage with other men in authentic and non-competitive ways.

Making a similar case for the support of men through Men's Centers, Dixon (2010) examines the Center for Men's Leadership and Service at St. John's University, as well as the University of Oregon Men's Center, describing for both a mix of programming on health, attitudes, and behavior important to the development of a coherent masculinity. Both examine gender and the role of men in re-creating and reinforcing the gender binary. Yet in answering the question of why Men's Centers are scarce, the author concludes that "it's generally recognized that men already have full access to educational and employment opportunities as required by law. A large body of research exists which clearly documents gender-based discrimination against women" (p. 50). Further, he points out that the history and culture of the United States and the world is described largely through the accomplishments and achievements of men, calling into question the need for centers to advocate for men's vulnerabilities. Certainly, if Men's

76

Centers are inscribed into campus cultures, they must be created with a mission and purpose that clearly and directly reflects how they vision a socially just identity construction for men grounded in the reduction of oppression.

Research on centers serving additional campus cohorts. Lazano (2010) details an educational culture where Latinos, the fastest growing minoritized population in the United States, face significant hurdles to persistence, leading to a 57% national high school graduation rate (versus 89.4% of Whites), and just a meager 11% earning bachelor's degrees by the age of 25 (lower than all other racial classifications). At the collegiate level, in particular, the author stresses the importance and lack of "'cultural nourishment' for Chicano students in fighting feelings of marginalization and alienation on campus" noting that the source of that nourishment is drawn from "family, friends, language, role models, and existing cultural works (music, art, etc.)" (p. 9). The author draws attention to the value of ethnic enclaves, that can act as "safe havens from White cultural domination" (p. 10) for Latino students, and posits that Latina/o Culture Centers can serve in this capacity at predominantly white institutions.

First established in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and existing on 27 campuses in 2010, Latina/o Culture Centers have the capacity and potential to bridge the gap between students and institutions, serving as a symbol of support and a commitment towards bettering the campus climate. Within these centers, students are able to "vent their anger in group discussions, strategize future actions, and provide emotional support as they balance academic responsibilities with active resistance to social injustices" (Lazano, 2010, p. 13). Of course, centers also provide a range of services to students, including: academic support services and tutoring; purposeful interactions with student, faculty and

staff role models; facilitation of networking and supportive contact with and from Latina/o alumni; leadership development; general individual affirmation and community development; and campus cultural and educational programming.

Additionally, the author points out that multicultural centers that seek to serve students across boundaries of identity are often unable to fully comprehend the degree to which Latina/o identity is "complex and involves issues of language, bicultural identity, biracial identity, ethnic background, generational residency status, indigenous identity, sexual orientation, gender roles, and internalized oppression" (Lazano, 2010, p. 12). Encouraging interactions and programming collaborations across independent or semi-independent culture center units is valuable and effective, far moreso than attempting to combine centers into a single enterprise.

Finally, the author notes a sparsity of literature that exists about Latina/o Culture Centers, and suggests a number of studies with the potential to build on her initial examination of them.

Culture centers serving the needs of Asian American and Pacific Islanders exist on 30 campuses, according to Liu, Cuyjet and Lee (2010), and were largely organized starting in the 1990s. In describing the value of these units, the authors first note the complexity of Asian ethnicity, referring to sources that describe anywhere from 11 to 40 disparate cultural groups and nationalities represented under the Asian American umbrella. As a whole, Asian Americans are more likely to attend college and persist to graduation than students of other ethnicities, however, all groups don't fare equally, and for some, significant cultural and institutional barriers exist in the educational pipeline. Yet, the model minority myth suggests that because of the success that Asian Americans

generally experience on campuses, that there is little need for attention or resources to be expended in seeking out or meeting additional needs. Disadvantageous stereotypes and beliefs significantly hamper Asian Americans from full engagement in and rich benefits of their college experiences.

Thus Asian American students, as other underrepresented groups, have need for space that is "celebratory but also serves as a physical space of resistance and activism, networking and student development" (p. 28). Asian American Culture Centers perform many of the functions as those serving African-American students, Latina/o students, women and other marginalized groups. Some of those functions include: Celebrating culture while increasing awareness and sociopolitical consciousness; fostering interactions between and among those who identify across Asian ethnicities; developing sensitivity among students, faculty and staff; addressing intersectionalities, particularly of sexual orientation, social class, gender, and other identities where students may experience significant conflict between traditional Asian and Western values; addressing disconnects between traditional activities of leadership and cultural epistemologies surrounding leader- and follower-ship; providing strong role-models and personal supports; mentoring; advisement of student organizations; and providing for social interaction and spaces of belonging and acceptance (Liu et al., 2010).

Students of American Indian heritage often find that their college experiences are characterized by alienation, isolation, dissatisfaction, and acts of overt racism and intolerance. Sacrificing "the comfort and familiarity of their close-knit tribal communities to attend predominately White institutions, the experience is often traumatic" (Shotten et al., 2010, p. 50). Indeed, the climate on campuses for American Indian students

contributes to a 36% 6-year graduation rate (compared to 56% for the general population), and American Indians are account for just 1% of the total postsecondary student population. American Indian Culture Centers can provide support and resources to assist American Indian students in navigating institutional obstacles, keeping common tribal values of kinship, communality, and cooperation central. Centers can also provide: cultural events and programming; tools that assist students in overcoming institutionalized racism; places to report and respond to perpetrated acts of harassment and intolerance; social connections; and sanctuary.

The authors tell the story of the Jim Thorpe Multicultural Center at the University of Oklahoma, which serves an American Indian student population of 1600 on a campus of 25,000. In a structure that originally served as a dormitory for American Indians, the Center was officially established in the mid-1980s. The space includes meeting and recreational space, cooking and dining facilities, cultural artifacts and artwork, trophies and evidence of the accomplishments of past American Indian student groups, and memorabilia that links current student journeys to those of alumni. The Center serves "as a home away from home, a meeting place for students, a safe haven, and a culture center" (Shotten et al., 2010, p. 54).

Documenting 15 American Indian Culture Centers on campuses, Shotten, Yellowfish, and Cintron (2010) note the diversity of tribal culture, and that "what is culturally relevant to one tribe may not be to another. Attempts should be made to work with area tribes and communities to develop centers that reflect the tribal culture(s) of the region" (57). With nearly 562 federally recognized tribes in the United States, ample opportunity exists for campuses to engage dialogue and interaction with local tribes, and

help to provide local linkages to support American Indian students who may be many miles from home.

Francis and Kraus (2012) describe coming to terms with the needs of increasing numbers of veterans arriving on their campus under the GI Bill. While commonly exhibiting many identity characteristics associated with privilege, such as whiteness, maleness, and heterosexuality, this group of students also had significant and unique experiences that led to feelings of isolation from the campus and set up barriers to persistence. For example, many veteran students were married and had families, were financially independent, some were dealing with disabilities or PTSD, and most had intense field experiences that provided significant differentiation from other undergraduate peers. These students also most strongly identified as veterans, before other identities grounded in race, sex, disability, etc. As a cohort, veterans also shared characteristics of other traditionally marginalized groups, in that relatively low numbers fully utilized their GI Bill benefits, accessed and persisted at lower rates than peers, and "encounter social dynamics on campus that are shaped by bias and stereotype" (p. 12).

The Student Veterans Center at the University of Arizona was founded to serve many functions for veterans on that campus, and similar to those that characterize culture centers grounded in identities of race, gender and sexual orientation--as a "refuge, resource center, study space, game room, and place for organizing" (Francis & Kraus, 2012, p. 12). The Veterans Center is staffed by professionals, and helps with the transition from "intense jobs with high stress and responsibility" (p. 12) in military contexts to a relatively unstructured college context where veterans find themselves on par with first-year students' status. As they work through this change, "they may appear

raw, volatile, or angry. And, in reality, many are. PTSD may exacerbate these emotions and complicate interactions."

Providing centralized resources and support creates a home away from home for these students along with caring professionals who can help to recognize trauma and provide resources and referral. The Center also actively collaborates with other campus culture centers and the Women's Center to provide collaborate and interactive campus experiences, safe zone trainings, and other dialogues that "blur the boundaries between veteran and non-veteran communities and help to build cross-cultural relationships that benefit all groups" (p. 14). The Student Veterans Center provides an example of a non-traditional cultural center that uses the same principles to serve a campus community in need, and inspires creativity in how the model might address the needs of additional identity groups.

Research on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Resource Centers. Noting the growing number of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Campus Resource Centers (LGBT CRCs) established on campuses during the 1990s, Sanlo's (2000) study attempts to describe common characteristics among them. While the findings themselves, now more than a decade old, have historical value, the context that Sanlo places them in is the true value of this article. She notes the specialization of student affairs practice to focus professional efforts on narrow cohorts of students with common developmental needs and obstacles, such as those in leadership programs, Greek letter organizations, or with common racial or faith identities, or to align with major work products, such as student activities, residential life and housing, or career services.

Extending this specialization to prepare higher education professionals with skills and experiences appropriate to understanding the diversity of LGBTQ+ identities, histories and cultures, along with the professional capacity to assist students in succeeding at institutions they may find hostile is invaluable, both to the success of students and of institutions. Thus the piece provides a foundational theoretical argument for the establishment and existence of LGBT CRCs to best meet the educational needs of students, and provides an initial overview in the professional literature that describes how existing centers are staffed, funded and administered.

A second piece uses storytelling to trace the origins of the Oregon State University Pride Center. Envisioned by students in Winter 2000, the evolution of the Center from a student-fees supported experiment, provisionally staffed by two undergraduate students to its existence as an independent student affairs unit supported by a full-time coordinator and two student coordinators is inspiring. However, the telling does not gloss over the deep resistance among some community members to the Center's creation or the institutional and cultural obstacles to its development. As a realistic portrayal of campus climate, politics and progress, Ryan's (2005) testimonial contributes significantly to our understanding of how LGBT Centers come to be on a campus.

Grounding his research in political opportunity and resource mobilization theory, Fine (2012) uses regression to determine the factors that are most likely to contribute to the presence of an LGBT Center on a campus. A greater likelihood of the existence a center was associated with an institution's public status, greater selectivity, a lower faculty-staff ratio, higher tuition rates, larger campuses with greater overall enrollments, and location in a politically liberal state. The value of the institution's endowment, level

of urbanization, and its racial and gender demographic make-ups were not found to influence the existence of a center. The author conceptualized these predictors to indicate that larger institutions with more diverse student needs, more prestigious institutions, and those situated in more liberal political contexts were more likely to have LGBT Centers, on balance.

Two recent studies specifically considered the support and advocacy provided to transgendered students within and by LGBT Centers. Steinour (2013) used semi-structured interviews with eight LGBT Center professional staff members from institutions located in Mid-Atlantic states to determine existing modes of transgender student support, challenges faced by staff in establishing and administering policies around transgender identity, and future directions for facilitating transgender inclusiveness on campus. The study found that center staff placed a high priority on working to ensure campus measures were taken to move beyond mere tolerance or acceptance of transgendered students, but to create trans-friendly spaces, or those characterized by widespread "awareness and knowledge about transgender issues, the offering of transgender specific services, advocacy for transgender students and the necessity of staff and administration to implement equitable and fair practices for gender minorities" (p. 21).

The challenge in this process for center staff was that change was too often re-active rather than proactive on the part of campus decision-makers. Particular pride was taken by center staff related to collaborations and outreach that had been made to include an understanding of transgender students in critical operations of the institution, or those critical to the needs of transgender students, such as: health and counseling services;

student insurance plans and coverage; social opportunities, support and networking; and safe zone and ally programs (Steinour, 2013).

In terms of future activities, center staff reported that institutional culture was firmly grounded in structures that adhered to and reinscribed the gender binary. Acting to reform and revision institutional culture towards a broader gender conceptualization was described as necessary, but almost insurmountable, and in several cases, reinforced by ordinance and state law. The structure and environment within centers themselves, however, were believed to characterize and model this gender fluidity.

The second study uses discourse analysis of 16 reports generated at four Big Ten institutions between 1992 and 2010 that address the inclusion of gender identity and expression in non-discrimination policies, and the status of transgender people on those university campuses. Dirks (2011) found that LGBT Centers are acknowledged as providing the campus with expert guidance and advocacy for "all things queer" (p. 117) but are generally also acknowledged on these campuses to being perpetually understaffed, under-resourced, and at some risk for continued existence. Other instances that reference centers call for expanded roles, and the necessity of center staff inclusion in decision-making, but fail to offer specifics in terms of commitment or strategy to resolving staff and resource limitations. Beyond the bounds of Dirks study, this is the precarious circumstance faced by many centers, characterized by many competing demands for the provision of services and support, and a dearth of resources and staff to respond effectively to more than core mission objectives.

Reviews of identity and student development theory first provided a context for the experiences and unique challenges of LGBT students on campus, Queer Theory and

QueerCrit posited a unique lens through which to examine institutional responsibilities for providing a fully realized educational experience for all students, and discussion of microaggressions helped to reveal the insidiousness of bias. Finally, an examination of the literature considered existing researching debating the value of culture centers, with other pieces focusing on the roles or essential value of centers in meeting their purposes.

Summary

        Theory serves as a critical point of departure in understanding the roles and purposes of LGBT Centers on college campuses. Through understandings of how non-heteronormative identities are developed along with principles of college student development generally, the queer theory lens can help explain the role and impact of microaggressions on LGBTQ+ students and campus climate, and how culture centers have the potential to assist in mitigating these negative experiences for underrepresented students. Attention now turns, in Chapter 3, to processes of data collection and research methodologies.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this study is to explore the essential value of LGBT Centers. In particular, the study considers: what are historical and current contexts of the LGBT Centers? What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students? Who are the Centers for and what purposes do they serve? What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity? To best understand the phenomena in question, qualitative research is proposed for this inquiry.

The project was carried out in two phases. Phase 1 identified institutions that were willing to serve as host sites for the researcher through the use of an online survey instrument. Drawing upon survey responses, purposive sampling was used to select three sites for further focused investigation. Purposive sampling is deliberate, but not random, seeking subjects that will contribute richly to a thorough understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Vogt, 2007). The selected sites together represent a diversity of Center and institutional characteristics.

Phase 2 included site preparations and visits, and the collection of qualitative data, including the collection of Center and institutional documents for analysis, interviews with Center and institutional staff and with students, and researcher observations of

campus gatherings and activities. Site visits lasted three days to allow for successful

completion of the range of researcher activities planned. It was anticipated that at each

research site, a survey on LGBT Campus Climate would be used to gather quantitative

data about general perceptions of attitudes and experiences of students around issues of

LGBTQ+ identity to best triangulate student experience and campus climate. This was

representative of a mixed methods research strategy of coherent triangulation, where both

qualitative and quantitative methods are employed simultaneously to gather data

regarding a phenomenon, and then juxtaposed in analysis to generate richly constructed

meanings and facilitate highly informed conclusions (Creswell, 2007). However, this

additional research element required too much capacity of students and staff at research

sites already stretched to support a research visit, and therefore the research methodology

was revised to exclude it.

The following pages will expand on this briefly posited methodology by: re-

stating the research questions; providing further detailed articulation of the research

phases, including grounding from the methodology literature to support and affirm that

the methodological choices proposed were the most appropriate to best answer the

research questions posited; descriptions of research participants; examples of proposed

measures and data collection instruments; and a discussion of data analysis activities.

Research Procedures

To answer the research questions, the research project unfolded in two phases.

Phase 1 identified institutions that were willing to serve as cases and host sites for the

researcher. Phase 2 included site preparations and visits, and the collection of qualitative

data, and incorporates the Critical Theory concept of reciprocity, whereby the research

provides a return benefit to the participants. The research findings will empower the

communities that I work with through my case study analysis to create traction for

leveraged self-understanding and institutional change around LGBTQ+ issues. Each

phase of the proposed research is described thoroughly below, with specific details about

participants, measures and data collection instruments, and data analysis to follow.

Phase 1: Determining Research Sites

Phase 1 identified institutions that would be willing to serve as host sites for the

researcher through the use of an online survey. LGBT Center staff were contacted

through email using a research listserv maintained by the Consortium of Higher

Education LGBT Resource Professionals, a national organization serving Centers and

Center staff, and committed to "critically transform higher education environments so

that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, faculty, administrators, staff, and

alumni/ae have equity in every respect" (Consortium of Higher Education LGBT

Resource Professionals Inc., 2012). Further, direct email contact was initiated with

Center directors in Illinois and its contiguous states to encourage responses from these

sites since their proximity to the researcher created logistical efficiencies that ultimately

favored them as selected sites.

The sampling methodology employed in this phase of the project was total

population sampling, which attempts to survey the entire population. Falling within the

framework of purposive sampling, total population sampling was valuable in this instance

because it allowed the researcher the broadest reach in identifying potential sites that best

aligned with the criteria that was used to choose sites for further focused research. In this

case, highly desirable sites were those that, combined, represented a diversity of Center

and institutional characteristics, as well as Center involvement in instructional or research

activities of the institution, and to which the researcher could travel within project bounds

of budget and time. Purposive sampling, such as used here, is often used when seeking

research subjects from an uncommon group (Vogt, 2007), in this case institutions with

LGBT Centers that shared some common desirable characteristics, but were

differentiated in others. As a sampling strategy, purposive sampling is deliberate, but not

random, seeking subjects that contribute richly to a thorough understanding of the

phenomena under investigation (Vogt, 2007).

   While the complete proposed Survey of Center Directors and Staff is included as

Appendix A, and discussed further with other Measures and Instruments of Data

Collection, the data it gathered helped to describe: the activities conducted at Centers;

recent assessment activities; documents available for analysis; intersections between

Center activities and the institution's instructional and research activities; and willingness

to act as a research site host. From this gathered data, potential sites were purposively

sampled such that the three selected sites represented a diverse array of Center and

institutional characteristics.

   The researcher anticipated a project scope such that inclusion of three cases would

generate a volume of data sufficient to answer the research questions while still honoring

project bounds of time and budget. However, as the project unfolded, further analysis of

research sites was undertaken to assure for triangulation and the best research outcomes.

Triangulation is a concept that describes the researcher practice of confirming data from

one source with data from additional sources. Triangulation occurs when: experiences

described in an interview are also observed in practice; document analysis describes

policies that are also described similarly in interviews as implemented by participants; or

several studies describe the phenomena of interest similarly. Triangulation is best

characterized by multiples, "multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple

investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings" (Merriam, 2009, p.

215).

Once research sites were determined, Phase 2 which describes the preparation of

sites and the researcher site visits was enacted and is described below.

Phase 2: Preparing and Visiting Sites

Once sites were determined and agreements were made with institutional Center

directors or hosts, the researcher initiated a planning meeting to discuss appropriate

preparations that were put in place to facilitate a robust understanding of the case through

observations of its core activities and contact with Center participants at all levels to

facilitate the most robust data collection possible. The meeting included discussion of:

determination of mutually convenient visit period(s); visit activities; document

acquisition; logistics of the climate survey; determining interview participants and

arranging interviews; and other visit logistics, such as the potential for campus or

campus-proximate lodging, options for navigating campus, internet access, and interview

and work space arrangements.

Before the site visit(s) commenced, the researcher gathered from the institutional

host a series of relevant documents for analysis, as they existed. Examples of documents

collected included: the Center mission; Center annual reports for the previous three years;

Center staff position descriptions (professional and student staff); Center budget

allocations; policy recommendations; Center website; institutional website;

internal/external CAS reports; Center assessment results and/or reports; organizational

structure chart; and an institutional non-discrimination statement if such included sexual

orientation and gender identity. Documents were an important part of data collection

because of what they "reveal about the program–'things that cannot be observed,' things

'that have taken place before the evaluation began'" (Merriam, 2009).

Data were collected during the site visit primarily through qualitative methods

where the "researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis"

(Merriam, 2009, p. 15). Merriam described the practice of qualitative researchers as

integrated into and participative of their domains of research, as largely focused on

observations of participants and activities in their natural settings, as intending to

"describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the

frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p.

13), and as engaged in sense-making, or the connecting of people's experiences and

understandings or interpretations of them.

To further this goal, the researcher proposed to interview a number of participants

at each research site, including the Center director and staff, the person to whom the

Center reports, a representative from the Office of the Provost, and students representing

a variety of LGBTQ+ identities who had interactions with the Center. The semi-

structured interview outlines are provided in Appendices B - E and discussed further with

other Measures and Instruments of Data Collection.

Interviews such as these are intensely valuable to the qualitative researcher.

Merriam (2009) explains that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe

behavior" (p. 88), and is a tool that researchers use to gather data that exists in the mind

of another, such as experiences or understandings. Interviewing is a skill, and its effectiveness as a systematic data-gathering methodology is learned through practice, reflection and rigor (Dana, Dana, Kelsay, Thomas, & Tippins, 1992; Dilley, 2000). As a form, the semi-structured interview, as employed in this research, draws upon flexibly worded questions, and allows the interviewer to gather additional data or pursue a line of thought that flows from the participant's responses through the use of prompts and follow-up questions (Merriam, 2009).

Additional data were gathered through direct observation of: LGBT club meetings and activities; informal interactions in the Center; meetings of Center-associated courses; and informal interactions of social spaces dominated by the majority, such as those in the student union, athletic center or library. Observation is an important device of data collection because it allows researchers to "pay special attention to a few things to which others ordinarily give only passing attention" (Merriam, 2009, p 118) and allows an observer to "notice things that have become routine to participants themselves, things that may lead to understanding the context" (p. 119) of a case under investigation. In this case, the researcher's observations gave fresh eyes to interactions that may have felt unremarkable to those involved, and not worth discussing in the context of an interview, but which nonetheless contributed to triangulation and a more thorough understanding of the research questions.

In the study, the researcher guided the practice of interviewing, collected observational data, determined paths and avenues for additional data collection, and analyzed and interpreted the data himself (Merriam, 2009). This research design was therefore adaptable to additional information and new understandings that were

93

evidenced to the researcher through the course of the investigation. This allowed

emerging concepts to be pursued and scrutinized for support or their lack (Caudle, 2004).

Data for this phase of the study was gathered through document collection, semi-structured interviews, and observations through an emergent design. Qualitative research is inductive, which is to suggest that its intention is to explore, gather, organize and conceptualize data, rather than to test hypotheses as in deductive research (Merriam, 2009). Data gathered for this phase of the project was grounded in the question, "how do," reflecting the study's interest in the experience, broadly understood, of participants as members of a campus and Center communities, and their understandings of those experiences. This study's research questions were not suggestive of a common path or a common LGBTQ+ experience, consistent with the lack of expectation described by Merriam (2009).

The Role of the Researcher

My research draws heavily on a tradition of qualitative methods that posit the "researcher [as] the primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). Merriam describes the practice of qualitative researchers as integrated into and participative of their domains of research, as largely focused on observations of participants and activities in their natural settings, as intending to "describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (p. 13), and as engaged in sense-making, or the connecting of people's experiences and understandings or interpretations of them. While quantitative methods, often grounded in a positivist frame that somehow exempts the researcher from scrutiny, are less subject claims of researcher

subjectivity than qualitative methods, I posit that researcher subjectivity has much influence over both forms. Thus, it is important that I, as the researcher, explore some of my own biases and subjectivities, so as to expose and mitigate unintentional or invisible bias or influence.

Peshkin (1998) cautions that when "subjectivity remains unconscious, [researchers] insinuate rather than knowingly clarify their personal stakes" (p. 17). Making note of these subjective "I's" as he terms them, allows the researcher to be fully honest and aware of preconceptions and biases that may influence understandings, conclusions, implications and recommendations of research. I use the following paragraphs to interrogate and explore my subjectivities, my motivations and my research voice.

As a practitioner in student affairs as well as a researcher, I must acknowledge first that this research is both *about* LGBTQ+ students, but it is also *for* LGBTQ+ students. It exists so that LGBTQ+ students may be better served, so that the campuses in which they find themselves may be made safer, and so that those who work in the field, such as the researcher, may ultimately do better at the work of supporting students, to which many of us have devoted immeasurable effort.

As a white gay man and member of the LGBTQ+ community, my research presumes from the outset that LGBTQ+ students and people have a rightful and deserved place of equity and equality on campus and within our larger society. It assumes that contexts of inequity, harassment or outright hostility are unjustifiable, and that the outcome of inquiry should be strategies for diminishing the negative experiences of LGBTQ+ students and people.

95

I choose my theoretical frameworks because I think they incorporate an element of praxis and are situated closer to the examination and unpacking of lived experience than other theoretical frames I've encountered. My life's work in student affairs is grounded in praxis, and as such, it feels very natural to me as a way of thinking and a lens for understanding.

I am also aware that my research voice is paradoxical. What I want for myself, I don't want for anyone else. Which is not to say that I want to be better than or think that my way is better than anyone else's way. I see my way as simply that: my way. And an evolving way, at that. I am a gay man. I am an atheist at times, and an agnostic on high holidays. I am white. I am highly educated. I have more resources than I need or probably deserve. I have good friends and colleagues, and I'm still lonely. I speak from a place of privilege and from a place of marginalization. I'm mostly happy. I'm often fulfilled.

My voice is what it is. It is my essence. It is an expression of my deeply held values, and my self-realizations. My professionalism and my scholarship. My hopes and fears. Especially my fears: When I think of my research voice and my fears, I think of Audre Lorde who said "Your silence will not protect you" and "When I use my strength in the service of my vision it makes no difference whether or not I am afraid." Especially my hopes: I hope that my research voice can help to make things better, to make things easier, to help provide comfort and support for others, for my colleagues, for my students. To make this world a better place.

Participants

Each phase of the proposed research project drew on a different set of participants, therefore discussion of participants is broken into distinct sections dealing

96

with each of these unique groups.

Participants in the Survey of Center Directors and Staff

Potential participating institutions were identified based on responses to the
Survey of Center Directors and Staff. The Survey was distributed through a research
listserv maintained by the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource
Professionals, and through direct email contact inviting participation from Center
directors in Illinois and its contiguous states. Responses were anonymous, unless survey
respondents choose to self-identify and agree to follow-up contact as a potential research
site. The Consortium listed 185 active centers on its website at the time of the survey, any
of whom might have served as a potential research site.

Participants in Site Visit Interviews and Observations

At the three selected campus visit sites, purposive sampling was used to invite
participation in semi-structured interviews with the researcher. Participants were
identified in two ways. The first cohort was identified by position type; interviews were
invited with all Center professional staff, with the person to whom each Center reports,
and with a representative from the staff of the Provost. These participants were targeted
because they can best speak to the mission and purposes of the Center, the degree to
which the Center's activities align with its stated mission, and the centrality of the
Center's activities to the instructional and research cores of the institution. It was
expected that this cohort included three to five participants at each research site.

The second cohort was drawn from students, and in consultation with the
institutional host, the researcher sought to seek participation from students who meet the
following criteria: had attained at least sophomore status; involvement and familiarity

97

with the Center; and collectively represented a diversity of personal characteristics and LGBTQ+ identities. These criteria were selected to ensure that the time of the participants would be well utilized through the participants' abilities to respond thoughtfully and thoroughly to the questions posed, as well as to reflect broadly the diversity of Center constituents and the student body. It was expected that this cohort would include seven to nine participants at each research site.

Through contact with the research host at each institution, potential interview participants were identified, and a request to participate was forwarded via email to potential participants. The request described the research project and participant requirements, and asked students interested in serving as subjects to respond. The request assured that potential participants were free from a coercive influence to participate because the researcher had no institutional affiliation or influence. Potential participants without an interest had only to ignore the single email request, and no further intrusion would be made on their commitments.

For all interviews, those interested were asked to respond directly to the researcher to volunteer for the study, and through e-mail, the details of informed consent and participation were shared. The interviewer arranged a 45 to 60 minute audio-taped interview to be conducted in-person at a time and location of the participant's choosing and within the timeframe of the site visit. Because interviews were arranged to the specifications of the participants, it was assumed that their location and timing was suitable to the provision of a safe, comfortable and reasonably confidential environment.

At the conclusion of site visits, interviews were conducted with 27 students and 8 Center staff for a total of 35 semi-structured interviews. As a function of the interview,

98

student participants were asked to describe their sexual orientation and gender identity, and to identify significant identity intersections that were important to them or which informed their experiences and self-understandings. All student participants identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community, although the specific identity understandings represented an incredible diversity of nuance and individuation. Participants are described below through personal information that was shared or volunteered as important to their identity conceptualizations.

Gender identity. 20 participants used a term or label to describe their gender identity. Two participants used trans as a label and one described himself as a transman. Four participants identified as cisgender, with an additional participant describing themself as cisgender but questioning and a second as cisgender genderqueer and fluid. Three additional participants used the term genderqueer alone, while one preferred gender fluid and another used gender neutral. Two participants described their gender identity as masculine, one expressed as feminine but gender fluid, another as within the female spectrum, and an additional used woman/fem as a descriptor. A final participant used ambiguous to describe their gender identity.

Sexual orientation. All 27 student participants described their sexual orientation. One participant claimed asexuality. A second participant identified as polyamorous straight in a multi-partner relationship. Three participants identified as bisexual, although one indicated the label applied only if a label must apply or if the participant was pressed to apply a label. An additional bisexual qualified that they were bisexual, homoromantic but still figuring it out. Four participants identified as gay, with an additional participant clarifying a gay, aromantic sexual orientation. Three participants used lesbian as a

descriptor, with an additional two indicating that they were lesbians, but it was a complicated self-understanding or a term that didn't quite fit their personal circumstances. Another participant indicated that she was lesbian panromantic. Five participants identified as queer and an additional person as queer pansexual. Two participants used the term pansexual alone to describe their sexual orientation, another indicated being pansexual but it's complicated, and a fourth described themselves as pansexual panromantic. A final participant described herself as follows:

> I consider myself pansexual or bisexual. Labels don't really matter to me. I'm attracted to men, women, transmen, transwomen, whatever is out there. People call me straight. I don't care if you call me a lesbian. I don't care, it just depends on which side of the bed I wake up on. I don't strongly align with a certain identity like that, or an orientation, rather. But I definitely consider myself a part of the community. Maybe queer, I'd use queer probably, but only if I need to put a label on it.

This descriptor is valuable and important because it is characteristic of the detail and nuance that many participants brought to identity observations about themselves. The words and terms common to dialogues around LGBTQ+ identity, among others, felt in many cases constraining and needed to be qualified and customized.

Binary/non-binary. Two participants described themselves as non-binary and an additional two used fluid to describe themselves.

Gender/sex. Eleven participants expressed a gender or sex label. Three identified as a woman, with an additional participant identifying as a woman mostly, but masculine expressing. Another participant identified as a woman/female, and an additional participant identified as female. Three participants identified as a man and two more identified as male.

Race. Nineteen participants shared a racial identity. One participant described themselves as Caucasian, and another nine as White. An additional participant explained that they were White and Native American but their racial identity was complicated. Another participant also claimed Native American heritage, Mescalero Apache and Chicano. A participant identified as Mexican as an international student, and another indicated that they were first generation Mexican in the United States. An additional participant described herself as Latina. One participant described themselves as Black and a second used biracial Black as an identity descriptor. Two participants identified as Asian with one clarifying that she was "ABC" or American Born Chinese.

Socio-economic status. Eight participants identified with a social class status. Two identified as lower middle class, and one identified as firmly middle class, while a third identified as middle class but in a family that was economically downwardly mobile, and a fourth was middle class to upper-middle class. Three additional participants identified as upper-middle class.

Faith. Six students talked about faith tradition being a significant piece of their identity. Two identified as Catholic and two as Christian. One participant described themselves as a Sephardic Jew, and another as a religious anthropologist who bounced around and explored many faith traditions, but for whom spirituality was incredibly personally fulfilling and important.

College class. Eight students talked about their year in school. Three identified as being enrolled in graduate programs, two identified as sophomores, one as a junior and two as seniors.

Major. Sixteen participants discussed their major course of study: anthropology, apparel design, art history, biology (2), biomedical engineering, communications, engineering, ethnic studies, history (3), physics, political science, sociology, women and gender studies.

Additional. Students described a number of additional important identities:

- Two participants identified as disabled and two identified as being able-bodied. Another identified as a person who lives with mental illness, and an additional participant discussed being physically fit and healthy, but with a chronic skeletal stressor that resulted in chronic pain.
- Two participants identified as being survivors of abuse.
- Three described identity characteristics related to family and family relationships, such as middle child, child of divorced parents, widow or caregiver.
- Four participants described themselves a first generation students or first in their family to attend college.
- Four participants described campus involvements as important identity characteristics, with representation from a fraternity member, sorority member, a rugby player and a student leader.
- One participant identified as an International student and a second identified as a United States citizen, while a third identified as bilingual speaking Finnish and English.
- A number of participants used personal qualifiers, such as activist, feminist, drag queen, left-handed, life-long learner, pastor and, finally, human being.

Observations were made in public or semi-public venues, such as lounges, gathering and dining spaces, classrooms, meeting rooms, etc. In groups for whom attendance is typically limited, such as in a class or student organization meeting, the researcher was briefly introduced as an observer for that single gathering as a courtesy to participants. In other public or semi-public venues, observation of activities is ethically permissible without notice to those being observed.

Ethical Treatment and Human Subjects Concerns

Before the recruitment of potential participants to any phase of the study or the collection of any data, the research proposal was approved first through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedure at the researcher's institution to assure that the data collection was consistent with prevailing ethical frameworks. Upon the selection of host sites, the protocol was vetted with each Institutional Review Board where participants were recruited for an additional layer of oversight and support. Once approval was received from both layers of IRBs, data gathering for the research project commenced.

A semi-structured interview format was utilized to conduct each tentative 45-minute interview. Interview questions and prompts were designed to elicit the participants' recollections and articulations of prior experiences related to their experiences on campus as LGBTQ+ persons, their interactions with the Center, and their perceptions and experiences of the campus climate. The researcher anticipated that some of these experiences could be personal, private and difficult to share. Further, some reflections may have been critical of the campus environment, the activities or outreach of the Center and its staff, or of other elements of the campus, and may have been difficult to disclose to an outsider.

Although these represented minimal physical, psychological and social risks, attention was given to reducing the risks of participation to participants as much as possible. Participants were notified before the interview of its scope, so as to forestall anxiety that might be provoked by being asked to share personal details with little warning. Participants were also instructed that they could decline to answer any question that made them uncomfortable or could discontinue the interview at any time without

penalty or consequence.

To protect the privacy, reputation and status of participants, pseudonyms were used in the recording and transcribing of interviews. Interview recordings were made on a digital audio recorder and transferred immediately to a password-protected computer workstation to which only the researcher had access. Despite the researcher being the only user of the workstation, the computer was password protected. Transcriptions were made as quickly as possible and audio recordings were deleted immediately upon completion of the research. Transcripts were maintained only for use by the researcher.

An ethical consideration of the Critical Theory paradigm is that the research must have real value for the participants. This principle of reciprocity suggests that while the researcher benefits from her or his interactions with and data drawn from contact with participants, they too must also benefit from the research in a direct, meaningful way. This research was crafted to provide work products and research deliverables to each case site, such as the results and analysis of the case study. These documents, particularly as consultant-generated external feedback, provided opportunities for participants to leverage awareness, conversation and change around furthering the status of LGBTQ+ students on each campus involved in the research.

<center>Measures and Instruments of Data Collection</center>

To accomplish the research protocol described herein, the researcher anticipated the use of one survey instrument, as well as four interview protocols. The survey instrument, the Survey of Center Directors and Staff was administered to professional staff of LGBT Centers to facilitate the selection of research sites that best served the study. As a function of site visits, the researcher engaged in semi-structured interviews

<center>104</center>

with various institutional staff members and students. Collectively, the interview protocols served as the second instrument of data collection. Each of these items are discussed in order.

Survey of Center Directors and Staff

The Survey of Center Directors and Staff was a 23-item survey. The first 13 items collected information about Centers that helped to identify rich sites that had the potential for a focused research visit. These items queried on: the range and mission congruence of various Center activities; obstacles to Center success; recent assessment activities; documents available for review; alignment of Center activities with the institution's instructional or research core activities; and the willingness of Center staff to host a research visit. An additional six items collected institutional demographic information, and the final four items, all optional, requested contact information for followup or further exploration of the Center as a site for a focused visit. The survey is included in its entirety in Appendix A.

Administration of this instrument served two purposes in this research project. First, the survey gathered data on a cross-section of Centers, to better provide context and affirmation of the representativeness of the selected Centers in relation to the greater population. Second, the collected data helped to narrow the field of potential research sites, and illuminated possibilities that had the greatest likelihood of answering the research questions effectively.

Finally, because the survey was created to serve the needs of this study, it is therefore unpublished, and no information exists on aspects of its reliability or validity. To mitigate this risk, analysis of the survey was limited to descriptive statistics and

response frequencies, occasionally parsed by institutional demographics to explore significant differences. Advanced statistical analysis using this survey data were not anticipated or conducted.

Interview Protocols

Four unique interview protocols were developed to guide semi-structured interviews with site visit participants, including the Center director and staff, the person to whom the Center reports, a representative from the Office of the Provost, and students representing a variety of LGBTQ+ identities who have interactions with the Center. Complete proposed semi-structured interview outlines are provided in Appendices B - E and each is described here.

The interview protocol for use with Center staff contained 21 items. It built on and drew out information based on that first submitted in the Survey of Center Directors and Staff, queried the participant's understanding of whether and how students experience microaggressions, activities of the Center designed to bolster students' skills and knowledge for resisting these everyday indignities, and asked participants to describe campus safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students. The interview also asked about the activities of the Center in advocating for and empowering students, and the ways that the Center's activities align with the instructional and research core activities of the institution.

The interview protocol for use with the unit supervisor, defined as the person to whom the LGBT Center reports, shared commonalities with the previous protocol. Its 17 items performed many of the same functions as that of the interview with Center Directors and Staff, with the exception of questions related specifically to students' experience of and skill development in resistance to microaggressions.

The third protocol, for use with the Provost or a proxy, narrowed the focus further, using 11 items to explore the congruence of the Center's activities with the instructional and research core, and asked the participant to describe ways in which the Center was essential to the operations of the institution, as well as ways in which it might have been viewed as vulnerable.

The fourth protocol, for use with students, shared a few commonalities with that for Center Directors and Staff, but was largely unique. In 19 items, the protocol queried on students' experience of microaggressions, and Center-related skill development in service of microaggression mitigation. But it also extended beyond that to explore the value and value-added experiences that students have had with, within and because of their involvement with the Center. Finally, the protocol also asked students to describe their experience of the campus climate, in general, as it intersected with LGBTQ+ identity.

Each of the measures and instruments of data collection described herein served to provide rich descriptions of the case under investigation, and to provide triangulated results to the study's research questions. Attention now turns to the process of data analysis.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Collected data must serve to answer each of the four research questions. Therefore, it was important to map the ways that data were intended to provide these answers. Find below each of the research questions listed, followed by the elements of collected data associated with its answer:

Map of Connections Between Data and Research Questions

RQ1: What are historical and current contexts of LGBT Centers?

- Document analysis: Mission, annual reports, policy recommendations, website
- Facilitation of initial survey with Center Directors and Staff, descriptive statistics and statistical analysis
- Interviews with Center Directors and Staff
- Interview with Resource Center's Unit Supervisor

RQ2: What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students?

- Document analysis: Mission; annual reports; policy recommendations; center website; institutional website; internal/external CAS reports; center assessment results and/or reports
- Interviews with LGBTQ+ students
- Interviews with Resource Center Director and Staff
- Interview with Resource Center Unit Supervisor

RQ3: Who are the centers for and what purposes do they serve?

- Interviews with LGBTQ+ students
- Center observations
- Student organization meeting observations

RQ4: What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity?

- Document analysis: Course offerings; center-associated course syllabi; center-associated research agenda; center staff publications, presentations, professional activities (drawn from CVs/resumes)
- Interviews with LGBTQ+ students
- Interviews with Resource Center Director and Staff
- Interview with Resource Center Unit Supervisor
- Interview with Provost Representative

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative research serves to describe a phenomenon in terms of rational, numbers-based analysis (Vogt, 2007). Drawing on statistical analysis, quantitative results are suggested to be self-edifying, however require no less interpretation than qualitative data counterpoints. The instrument used to collect quantitative data in this study, the Survey of Center Directors and Staff, was analyzed using:

- Descriptive statistics
- Frequencies of center essential activities
- Frequencies of staff member course instruction
- Coding and analysis of center research and faculty collaborative research
- Consideration of potential host sites

While the survey did lend toward the identification of rich research sites, broad participation in the survey was not observed and therefore analysis of limited results failed to produce richly detailed results that would provide for meaningful analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative research products are "richly descriptive" (Merriam, 2009, p. 16), utilizing all manner of data collected from participants, observations, documents, notes and analysis to roundly describe and explain the central phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). By virtue of its focus on understanding the occurrence and understanding of a natural social phenomenon, its interest in experience and understanding, its emergent design and use of the researcher as the primary unit of analysis, and the production of a richly descriptive output, this research practice is consistent with broadly articulated and understood hallmarks of qualitative research.

"The researcher coded the transcripts inductively according to responses identified in the informants' interviews (Patton 1990). Following a grounded theory

approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), new and distinct categories were identified and classified as open codes. The constant comparative method was used to identify common patterns within and across transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)" (Nunez, 2011). Qualitative data analysis predominantly took the form of open coding of interview transcripts and collected documents. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe open coding as a process whereby "the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data" (p. 62). By applying the researcher's own assumptions and understandings of the central phenomenon to these data elements, connection and meaning were created through the linkages of common experience, and similar participant understanding. Open coding, therefore, was a process of deep engagement between researcher and data to bring forth new constructs and epistemologies (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As interviews were conducted, they were transcribed verbatim, and the transcriptions then coded to identify common themes, and then related themes were grouped into categories as a way of creating meaning from the data. For each pass of a transcript, a different color highlight was used to continue and refine the process of coding. Through frequent referral to the Strauss and Corbin (1998) framework, and the McMillan and Schumacher (2000) handout, conformity to standards of qualitative practice were assured.

Once the data were coded, the codes were collected in a table, along with their frequency of use. This tabling of the meta-data allowed the researcher to then begin to associate codes with one another and within categories. These categories were closely aligned with the research questions, as recommended by Caudle (2004). Once codes were

organized into themes and categories and associated with research questions, the researcher returned to the transcripts for specific items of evidence with which to support the theoretical framework that had been developed.

Quantitative analysis depends on the reliability and validity of the measures used for data collection as a way of articulating the trustworthiness of the results (Vogt, 2007). Qualitative researchers use the terms trustworthiness and authenticity to describe similar principles "concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009, p. 209). Merriam (2009) posits that the findings obtained through qualitative research are "trustworthy to the extent that there has been some rigor in carrying out the study (p. 209).

Scholars of qualitative methodology describe a number of practices that qualitative researchers employ to obviate challenges to the rigor of qualitative methodology, such as: prolonged engagement or adequate engagement; triangulation; persistent observation; peer debriefing, reflexivity or researcher's position; negative case or discrepant case analysis member checks; the use of thick, descriptive data; and external auditing (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Merriam, 2009).

Lincoln and Guba (1994) discuss the concept of prolonged engagement, or the practice of researcher-subject contacts that allow a period of time suitable for both breadth and depth of researcher understanding of the phenomena in question. Prolonged engagement allows the researcher to inquire of and observe participants in a manner and for a length of time suitable to note important characteristics of and expose the researcher's misunderstandings of the phenomena or the participant's experience of it. In this study, interviews were scheduled for up to 60 minutes to allow for rapport, and the

thorough exploration of the participants' experience with the phenomena. Lincoln and Guba's (1994) concept of prolonged engagement shares commonalities with Merriam's (2009) concept of adequate engagement.

Merriam (2009) describes the qualitative technique of adequate engagement, or the necessity of the researcher to continue conducting qualitative inquiry until the phenomenon is fully explored and understood. Adequate engagement is reached when inquiry is saturated, or further collection of data confirms only what is already known or has already been collected, rather than providing new content for analysis. It was expected that through three arranged campus visits, and the 35 interviews conducted, along with observations and documents collected, that the level of saturation was reached in the collection of evidence for this study.

Triangulation is a concept that describes the researcher practice of confirming data from one source with data from additional sources. Triangulation occurs when: experiences described in an interview are also observed in practice; document analysis describes policies that are also described similarly in interviews as implemented by participants; or several studies describe the phenomena of interest similarly. Triangulation is best characterized by multiples, "multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 215). This study utilized triangulation by drawing data from multiple sources, from multiple campuses, and from multiple cohorts on each campus.

Lincoln and Guba (1994) describe the practice of persistent observation, or a researcher focus on the distinctive qualities of the phenomena. Persistent observation was applied in this research through the use of an evolving semi-structured interview script

112

that allowed the researcher to continue to refine inquiries based on data already collected. Another interview tool that facilitated persistent observation was the use of prompts, follow-ups and probes that elicited additional focused responses or explored central elements of the research phenomenon.

Peer debriefing is a technique whereby the researcher seeks out a disinterested third party upon whom developing hypotheses may be tested, an emerging research design may be processed, and with whom one might work out one's own reaction to collected data and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). This last element of peer debriefing is similar to Merriam's (2009) description of reflexivity or researcher's position, a tool the researcher uses to examine and expose his or her own experiences with the phenomenon, existing manifest or hidden biases, and reflect critically on the research instrument, in the person of the researcher. In this analysis, the researcher discussed at length the project and findings on a regular basis with the dissertation committee, in particular the committee chair and methodologist to obtain reflection and processing. Further, before undertaking the interview process, the researcher took part in a bracketing experience, using reflective journaling as a method of describing his own experiences as an LGBTQ+ student and with the phenomena in question. Bracketing is a process the researcher undertakes to bring to light one's own experiences and observations of the phenomena so that they are raised into the level of awareness. In so doing, the researcher is able to understand the full extent of his or her own biases, and then is able to bracket them, or set them aside, to conduct review and analysis of the data (Merriam, 2009).

Both Merriam (2009) and Lincoln and Guba (1994) discuss the technique of negative case analysis or discrepant case analysis. Using this tool, the researcher

intentionally seeks to find disjunctive data. By seeking data to disrupt the researcher's evolving or emerging understanding of the phenomenon, one is able to ask better questions, form more robust theoretical explanations, and address the central phenomenon in all of its messy, contradictory reality. As such, it was the practice of the researcher to make a complete and full report of findings, even those where the experience of one participant was contradictory to the experiences of others or most.

Conducting member checks allowed the researcher to re-connect with the participants to determine if the interview transcript was representative of the meaning that the participant wished to convey. It provided the participant and researcher with the opportunity to mutually obtain feedback and clarification from the other and establish a common agreement and understanding of the interview experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Merriam, 2009). Member checks were offered to all participants in this study via an emailed transcript of the interview. To minimize the burden of participation, participants were asked only to review the transcript if they wished, and to respond with clarifications or concerns.

Qualitative researchers provide evidence, in the form of collected data, to support their data analysis and research findings. The use of thick, descriptive data adds credibility to qualitative research because it allows the reader of a study to journey with the researcher, to be guided through the data, and to arrive at similar conclusions based on the weight of the evidence. Most often, evidence is provided in the form of participant quotations, giving voice to participants' experiences and understandings of the central phenomenon. Evidence that is richly descriptive and ample in quality and quantity helps to make a convincing argument (Merriam, 2009). This research study provides thick

descriptions of participants' experiences with the campus climate, with the Centers and descriptive of the activities of the Centers as related to the institutional core.

A final technique of qualitative research is that of external auditing, or having an independent third party examine the methodology, the collected data, the analysis and findings. The goal of the audit is to render the research practice dependable and the results confirmable. Once examined, the third party is able to confirm that the design and analysis was conducted in a forthright and ethical manner (dependability), and that the results of the study are reflected by the evidence collected (confirmability) (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Determinations have not been made at this time about whether or how to provide for external auditing in the case of this research project.

Summary

This research study explored the essential value of LGBT Centers. In particular, the study considered: what are historical and current contexts of the LGBT Centers? What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students? Who are the Centers for and what purposes do they serve? What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity?

Data were collected in two phases utilizing mixed methods, employing quantitative strategies that foster broad participation through survey instruments, and qualitative techniques that use document analysis, observation and a semi-structured interview format and emergent design to deeply engage participants in recollections and articulations of prior experiences related to their understanding of themselves as

115

LGBTQ+ persons and/or campus administrators juxtaposed with their campus and Center experiences. Interview data were transcribed, coded and then analyzed for commonalities through which themes were drawn from the data.

By virtue of its focus on understanding the occurrence and understanding of a natural social phenomenon, its interest in experience and understanding, its emergent design and use of the researcher as the primary unit of analysis, and the production of a richly descriptive output (Merriam, 2009), this research practice is consistent with broadly articulated and understood hallmarks of qualitative research.

Finally, attention was given to assuring the authenticity and trustworthiness of the research design and outcomes by virtue of the use of qualitative techniques of: prolonged engagement or adequate engagement; triangulation; persistent observation; peer debriefing, reflexivity or researcher's position; negative case or discrepant case analysis member checks; and the use of thick, descriptive data (Lincoln & Guba, 1994; Merriam, 2009).

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH SITES

Character and Climate of Research Sites

This research project describes the experiences of LGBTQ+ student participants

at three university campuses in the United States. This chapter will first provide a general

overview of each of the research sites and the climate on campus for LGBTQ+ people as

described by the study's participants. Then discussion turns towards a general typography

of campus spaces and experiences in which participants experienced exclusion and

marginalization, as well as campus spaces and experiences where participants felt

included and supported. Finally, the importance of microaggressions and counterspaces is

highlighted as the discussion turns to explore and articulate both microaggressions that

participants encounter and counterspaces that participants find, create and engage to

buffer negative aspects of campus climate.

Midwest Research University (MRU)

MRU is a large public institution whose LGBT Center is relatively recently

established. A combined set of unique characteristics of the campus, including strong

STEM programs and a school of agriculture, a large Greek system, and extremely

competitive sports teams, draws a greater male proportion of students than similar peer

institutions. The curriculum is rigorous with 78% of incoming students coming from the

top quarter of their high school class, and 55% of students are residents of the state. The

university's freshman-to-sophomore retention rate floats around 90%, with a four-year graduation rate of 50% and a six-year rate that falls around 70%. The college is the largest employer in the community it calls home, and the community has a suburban feel in an otherwise rural context. The next urban center is over an hour away through farmland over major highway systems.

The Center at MRU is staffed by a Director and a support person, and it is one of several identity centers on campus—from one more than 3 decades old to another established at about the same time as the LGBT Center and several others founded in intervening years as student needs have dictated. All campus identity centers report through a Chief Diversity Officer and are situated organizationally beneath the Provost.

The Center itself is off the beaten path, with offices on the third floor of a building that accommodates a strange collective of administrative and planning offices, and which is slated for demolition in coming years. It is expected that the Center will relocate to a more convenient, accessible and public space, although the current placement provides student users, especially those whose exploration and outreach to the Center are tentative and cautious, a level of privacy and anonymity that may ultimately be of benefit, especially in these early years as the Center finds its footing. The drawback is that it is a destination, and students must seek it out.

Within the Center is a vibrant collection of cultural artifacts and historical markers which cover the walls and serve as reminders of critical milestones in the fight for LGBTQ+ civil rights and social inclusion, and resources, such as books and movies, that are available for check-out and Center use. A large screen TV dominates the common gathering room populated by couches and chairs, and often students are

gathered around it interacting socially, books spread open on their laps, as queer-themed movies play in the background. Conversation turns to particular scenes or interactions of substance or amusement as students draw connections between their own LGBTQ+ experiences and those of characters on the screen. This often invites further conversation around and about identity and experience, and it is clear to the casual observer that these movies have been screened frequently and serve as tropes, the conversations comfortable paths through which students navigate new and growing identity understandings.

And that seems the main work of this Center—helping students grow comfortable in their skin and come to terms with a sexual orientation or gender identity that may have been out of bounds to them before they arrived on campus. Using Center resources to bring prominent LGBTQ+ voices, and to model and convey the culture and history of the movement creates a space of identity exploration, self-determination and growing ease. Students try out and express evolving identities through gender bending and explorations in fashion, manner and expression.

Participants shared their perceptions of the campus climate for LGBTQ+ people at MRU. The recent establishment of the Center on campus led Tara to observe the strong support for LGBTQ+ people from faculty and staff "which I think, makes for a really inclusive environment, because you have staff and faculty who are saying, 'We are allies,' and they're backing it up with their actions." Sheryl was one of the administrators who observed and facilitated that process of Center establishment, and experienced pushback. She affirmed that "there was a groundswell of folks who were saying we need this, but there was also the politics of moving it forward" and explained that the politics of resistance weren't overcome until external pressure from an accreditation visit was

119

applied and campus supports for LGBTs were noted as lacking.

Around peers, Craig noted that "I think it's pretty open. Most people, I think, just don't even know that they have gay friends, or that they're in the company of gay people, or queer people." Referring to his experiences as a gay man, he shared that "I really don't encounter too much negativity about it. I've never been harassed," and then rather dismissively recollected "I've been called out the window, somebody's called me a 'fag' as they were driving past."

For Landon there is frustration that "most of the community here is underground and I feel like that's [pause] in the long run it's bad for us here because, 'Oh we don't have any gays here. I don't see any gays around here'" is a common perception "that just kind of perpetuates the idea that there aren't that many gay people and then that they shouldn't be respected and stuff." While Landon has been very academically successful, his experience as an open gay man has been challenging. "I've had stuff thrown at me as I've walked down the street. It's happened like twice. I've had people just like yell, slurs at me as I walk down the street. That's happened like twice."

As a transman, Kent feels unsafe walking in neighborhoods outside the campus proper because he is unsure of how other students experience him, particularly in moments of intoxication or impaired judgment. "I have a black belt in Karate," he explained. "I could probably take care of myself, but that doesn't mean that it makes me feel like I want to do that. Nobody wants to experience that; it's just an uncomfortable situation."

Chelsea explained that describing a campus climate for LGBTQ+ people was "really hard for me to answer, because since I can blend in so easily, it's really hard for

me to get, like gauge." She also acknowledged that "most of the people that I come in contact with, granted the people I come in contact with are gonna be people that I like, they aren't hostile." After considerable consideration she concluded, "I wouldn't say that I've experienced a lot of aggression. But I know people who do not fit into the binary as well as I do; they do face a lot of aggression and hostility."

Tara made a similar observation, noting that the ability to blend in and be generally perceived as heteronormative facilitated acceptance. "For me, it's been fine. But I also have, like, passing privilege. If you look at me, a lot of people don't assume that I'm gay." Yet peers who don't comport with norms around expression have a more difficult time, she explained. "I know, for other people, it's very scary. I know a lot of people who aren't in the gay orgs because they're afraid. They're afraid of what other students will think."

Spryte noted that "As an Ace [or asexual], I kind of just blend in with the normal heterosexual crowd. So I don't see a lot of maybe discrimination that other people face. I guess it depends on where you are." Some of the exclusion and inclusion that Spryte observes depends on the campus sphere of influence and the presence of supportive others. Perhaps predictably, Spryte observed that "in the engineering and STEM fields, you get a lot more of cold shoulder for being LGBT or trans, but in the liberal arts or something… you get a lot more inclusive feel."

"I haven't had any problems with students other than sometimes weird looks from people who maybe don't really know about trans people or have to stick to the boy-girl kind of system," explained Andi who identifies as a transwoman. "Faculty, usually is tolerating and/or accepting. And the only problems I have with faculty, it's not usually

with the faculty itself so much as policies that [MRU] has in terms of housing and all that stuff." Andi explains that her biggest campus challenges have resulted from campus housing policies that bound students by physical sex and create alienation from female peers with whom Andi feels most comfortable living.

Yet despite many of the challenging conditions that students describe on campus for LGBTQ+ people, they also have found enclaves of acceptance, and they love their institution. They have had a hand in creating the safe, supportive and welcoming spaces that they need and expect. Their criticism and concern is offered at arms length, their challenges diminished, and their positive experiences of finding and exploring identity readily and openly articulated. Arica, who works in the Center and has frequent and regular interactions with students, shared that "I have not had many students tell me that they have experienced any negative things. We've had maybe two students, to my knowledge, experience really significant things, as far as discrimination or bullying, or something like that." The climate, as she understands it, "could be better, but I think that will always be the case." Pressed to explain further, she offered, "I don't think they would describe it necessarily as a hostile environment. I think, they're pretty comfortable, but like I said, there's always room for improvement." Eric who works with Arica in the Center helped put the experience of students at MRU in an important context:

> I think, for many of our students, coming to a campus that in a conservative state, and what has historically and continues to be perceived of, and in many ways still is a conservative institution, for a lot of our students though, they're coming from much more conservative spaces. And so, for a lot of our students, this is the most liberal place that they've ever been or this is the first place where they can even go to and say that they have found community of LGBTQ identified individuals. So, whatever the perception might be, this is the first time that they are finding that idea of that non-biological family that we often talk about and making those connections across identity. They're finding information about themselves, their

history, their access to information because we have a Center, because we have a library, because we have the minor in LGBT Studies that is so widely publicized and those classes are easily accessible to so many students. I think the access to information and the readily available staff and allies that people could go and speak to, creates an environment where students feel safe enough to ask questions, engage in conversations that they have never been able to elsewhere, and whether that's with peers or with individuals who are employees or just outside community members, I think they're making deep connections here that they don't find in their home spaces.

Western Comprehensive Commuter Campus (WCCC)

WCCC is a medium regional public institution that serves both first-time first-year and transfer degree seeking cohorts in approximately equal proportions, with the bulk of graduate programs at the Master's level and very limited Doctoral offerings. Student demographics illustrate a very diverse campus: 64% of students are domestic Students of Color with roughly similar proportions of those with Latino and Asian heritage, and a smaller percentage of Black and multiracial students. Women outnumber men, 1 in 5 students is 25 years or older, just over 93% commute to campus, and approximately 2% hail from out of state or out of country. Nearly half of students come from low income backgrounds, and 36% of students are first-generation. The student-faculty ratio is 25:1.

Situated in a mid-size city that is, in many ways, more conservative than its surrounding region, WCCC has a freshman to sophomore retention rate that bounces from the high 70%s to low 80%s. The six-year graduation rate of first-time first-year students hovers around 40%, which is less strong compared to the 60% six-year graduation rate for transfer students.

The LGBT Center at WCCC was established more than 20 years ago, and exists within the organizational structure alongside a Women's Center and Multicultural Center.

The three centers share a single Master's-level Director (who also serves as a campus deputy Title IX officer), and 2 graduate students, one of whom is committed to LGBTQ+ supports and works exclusively out of the LGBT Center. The Centers are situated within a deep student affairs organization, reporting through an Associate Vice President to a Vice President for Student Affairs that concurrently supervises enrollment management and Division I athletics.

The Center itself is physically housed in the main student union in a high traffic area and uses information displays outside its doors to attract interest and invite interaction with the largely commuter population that uses the student center or adjacent library as places to socialize and study for extended periods.

The walls of the Center are adorned with expressions of pride in the form of rainbows, posters and decor, along with student projects and academic posters that explore related issues through a variety of disciplinary lenses. In this way, students' experience represents the core of the Center, which remains true programmatically and through the Center's activities. For many of those who make use of the Center, it serves as a first space where sexual and gender identity formation have been intentionally fostered, particularly around intersections with other important identity characteristics.

Participants shared their perceptions of the campus climate for LGBTQ+ people at WCCC. Jade explained that "I think relative to other places, that it's probably a lot more accepting and inclusive.... But there's always just that level of ignorance. I find much more that I'm confronted with ignorance, rather than open hostility." Ale posited that the campus contained both welcoming and resistant spaces. "There are welcoming spaces on campus, like obviously here at the [LGBT] Center and I've been in classrooms

where things have been discussed and it's been open and it's been a space where you can discuss topics and things," she explained and contrasted that observation with another. "I've also had many experiences in classrooms where people have made comments, and I think that potentially could have made other people uncomfortable."

Faith put her positive experience on campus in the context of her overall life experiences and her identity expression:

> Well for me, it's been really positive. I'm a little more mainstream than some people in the way that I present. And so, I've had a real positive experience. And I've had a not-so-positive experience in some of the other realms that are part of my life. Like with my family, and church, and things like that. There's been struggles and challenges, and so it's refreshing for me to be in an environment that's as inclusive as [this institution]. But I do notice that it seems like the less mainstream you are in the way you present, the less inclusive the environment might seem.

Megan's expression falls outside the campus norm and her experience supports Faith's observation. Megan appears butch to masculine, favoring baggy athletic gear appropriate to her rugby involvement rather than more fashion-forward and feminine expression. While she acknowledged that "for the most part, it's very welcoming," she also shared a number of experiences where peers were reluctant to engage with her in class projects or social interactions, and she questioned the degree to which her expression influenced their reluctance. "But I don't know if it had anything to do with the way that I am or not."

Unlike Megan who feels like she stands out on campus, Stephen is a masculine-presenting gay man, a bit introverted and thoughtful, and fit but not particularly athletic. Dressed in jeans and a nondescript t-shirt, in most groups of peers he blends in rather than stands out. Nothing in his expression marks him as LGBTQ+ or differentiates him from majority peers. This allows him an interesting perspective from which to share his

125

perception that "I don't really hear any discriminatory remarks. Not that I'm saying they're not out there. Maybe I'm just not around those situations when they're happening."

Carlos perceived that identity cohorts on campus took too little advantage of opportunities for sharing and interaction, and this fostered exclusionary thinking and practice. "I don't think there is like a campus-wide [anti-LGBTQ+] sentiment," he shared, but "I do think the campus is very segregated within its student organizations. We all need to work better as a community to just sit down and address issues." G's experience of campus was similar to Carlos's and departed from her initial expectations of what she would find. "[WCCC] is a very diverse campus, and it's one of the most diverse campuses in [the state]. That was one of things that I did look at when I was coming [here]."

G's understanding of campus crystalized in the comments of a peer. "It wasn't until my coworker said, 'We can be diverse, but that doesn't necessarily mean we are inclusive.' I felt like that makes perfect sense," she explained. Continuing, she observed, "I wanna say that it is definitely very heteronormative. A lot of people that I've met are not out. That is one thing that I've noticed, that there's a lot of people that are not out." That makes encountering other out and open LGBTQ+ people particularly valuable for her. "When I do encounter another LGBT student, when it doesn't involve the Center, when I encounter another LGBT student, it's nice to see that there's little sprinkles of glitter here and there."

Shannon expressed that LGBTQ+ inclusion was bounded to a few campus spaces. "In terms of resources and community, when I first was looking for resources and community in terms of LGBT centered community it was only, there was the [LGBT

126

club], and there was the [LGBT] Center." She lamented that campus resources for LGBTQ+ people aren't better promoted and that awareness is lacking. Based on her own exploration and effort she "started to see that there's classes being offered and things like that. But I think it's still really lacking in terms of accessibility." She would like to see more prominent expressions of culture and inclusion, as well as avenues for involvement and community development. "There's not a really good base if you don't know about it and then you try and access it. It's kind of hard to find that base."

Tom shared G's assessment as he described the overall climate for LGBTQ+ people as "better than it's ever been, and it's ever-increasing. But I feel like our climate, for the majority of our students, is [pause] I can't think of a better word but it's not the right word, is apathetic." He explained that "Our students are mostly commuter students or live generally nearby so they don't invest a lot of time in the university." Thus for LGBTQ+ students who do not make efforts to engage with the campus or supportive resources and supports, he explains "you could go your entire career not knowing that there were services available."

Trevor explained that "I've never had a professor who was out and not straight. Out as not straight or cisgender. I'd say that's negative." A lack of accessible diversity and role models means for Trevor that campus is "fairly marginalizing to many people, especially students who are not necessarily quick to plug in somewhere." And plugging in takes effort because the community of LGBTQ+s is not well publicized and therefore a lack of community becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy. "We have, from my experience, a pretty small LGBTQ-identified community. So I think it's difficult for some people to even find other people who might identify anywhere in the queer alphabet" and

127

while there is "amazing stuff going on, and people are building community and doing great work…, there's also a sense of alienation on such a large university campus for many people, and I think that's increased for LGBTQ folks." Yet Trevor explains that those students who do connect with other campus LGBTQ+ people, supports and services "do have a good experience and feel that the climate is good."

Small Private Liberal Arts College (SPLAC)

SPLAC is highly selective and academically rigorous, drawing students from every state and over 75 countries. Over 75% of students rank in the top 10% of their high school graduating class, and freshman to sophomore retention is nearly 95% with a four-year graduation rate that consistently surpasses 90%.

Located in an urban center, students find that co-curricular and social opportunities regularly extend beyond the manicured campus grounds. Through its history, the institution has been more progressive than its state and city context. Yet the region of its establishment embodies a live-and-let-live attitude that furthers social justice and inclusion aims in the context of hard work and fiscal conservatism. The liberal arts mission of the institution is committed to scholarship and research, as well as social justice and human rights activism and awareness. The campus community has a global view, and an intellectual orientation.

The Center is organizationally positioned within a student affairs structure focused on cultural inclusion and advocacy work, with a single individual positioned to provide support and direction for services related to sexual and gender identity. But conversation and collaboration among and between team members with responsibility and expertise with specific areas of identity are critical as issues of intersectionality are

128

unpacked and addressed theoretically, programmatically and institutionally.

The physical Center on this campus is a student run space intimately connected to student affairs operations around multiculturalism and inclusion that includes a full-time professional staff member committed to work with LGBTQ+ students and related outcomes. As students talk about and experience the Center, they interchangeably refer to a gathering areas of tables and comfortable seating spaces distributed throughout the administrative offices on the first floor, and to the room available and staffed by students each evening in the basement that houses resources and materials specific to issues of sexual and gender identity. This situates the Center in one of three adjacent campus buildings that house student affairs offices and operations, and which collectively serve as student gathering spaces. And yet frequent users of the Center lament that it none the less maintains an unintentional exclusivity that may restrict interactions by students who don't specifically seek out its services.

Participants shared their perceptions of the campus climate for LGBTQ+ people at SPLAC. Hector shared that "I would describe it as generally welcoming…. Generally I had really good experiences, but that might also be because I've always been in safe spaces and with people with whom I feel safe basically." Lindsey's experience was similar. She said "It is very open and normal. And I think that was part of the reason I came here is because I knew it would be 'liberal enough' for anything – any of my queer participation to be the average [institutional] experience." Veronica shared that "I would have to say it's much better than I expected."

"For me, it's good," explained Mary. Yet she noted that "I can't say that for the whole community" because "I've noticed a lot of trans students are very unhappy with

129

the way things are so I can't speak for them, but as a bisexual, cisgender student, I haven't had any big problems." Jordan furthered this thinking. "It's not a one-size-fits-all type of thing, by any means. So, I oftentimes talk to students about there being multiple [institutions]." Students exist in different spheres and bring unique identities. "Depending on which aspect of the culture that you interact with the most, or which spaces that you find yourself inhabiting, it can either be super inclusive or sometimes very, very isolating," he explained.

Max explained that "I've generally found it to be pretty positive compared to what I hear about other schools. It's not perfect…but I can't imagine being at a better place." Sam's critique relates to the gap between where the institution is and where it could or should be:

> I think there are some really good things, but I think a lot of the time, [the institution] likes to say it's really good at things without addressing the ways that it's not living up to other things, kind of like, "We do this and this, so therefore, we're ahead of some of the other places and that's the end of it." And I think that's something that frustrated me.

Char explained that the inclusive climate she expected on campus has largely been affirmed. As she made the final choice of a college, she described making a pro/con list and recalled that "one of the things that was on the pro is that I thought that there were going to be more queer people here. And that the environment was just in general gonna be more welcoming than the [state university]." Her perceptions were grounded on institutional reputation and her campus visits. "So, I had a perception from the get go that [it] was going to be a welcoming place. And I think, for me, [the institution] has for the most part lived up to that."

Important Commonalities and Differences Among Research Sites

The sites for this research were intentionally selected to reflect considerable

diversity such that participants would also reflect a range of experiences. As such, sites

vary in the following critical and important ways:

- Midwest Research University and Western Comprehensive Commuter College are public while Small Private Liberal Arts College is private;
- Student populations at campus sites range from several thousand students to tens of thousands of students;
- The LGBT Center at WCCC has been in existence for more than 20 years, SPLAC's LGBT Center is about 10 years old, and MRU's was established within the last two years;
- Student diversity characteristics reflect that MRU and SPLAC are predominantly white while WCCC is majority Students of Color;
- MRU and WCCC are doctoral granting institutions, though WCCC has far fewer doctoral programs than MRU, while SPLAC is a baccalaureate granting institution;
- SPLAC's four-year graduation rate is over 90%, while WCCCs six-year graduation rate doesn't top 50%, and MRU graduates nearly 70% of students in six years;
- According to USNWR criteria, SPLAC is a highly selective institution, MRU is more selective, and WCCC is relatively selective;
- WCCC and SPLAC have more women than men on campus, but MRU's strong STEM and agriculture programs draw more men than women to its campus;
- WCCC and MRU have a Greek system, with nearly 30% of students affiliated at MRU, while SPLAC is not a home for fraternities and sororities;
- WCCC and MRU host Division I athletic programs, with MRU being nationally competitive across several high-profile sports and placing regularly in national contests, while SPLAC is a Division III school;
- Campuses studied are located in both Midwest and Western states;
- MRU is located in a Midwest state with regressive laws related to LGBTQ+ identity, but the campus and surrounding community tends to be more welcoming than the state of origin. WCCC's home state is progressive, but the city in which it is located is considered a conservative enclave. SPLAC is located in a Midwest state with a generally progressive history, and live-and-let-live ethos;
- MRU is a large campus located in a college town where it is the largest employer in its community. SPLAC is a small school in a major urban center and state capital, and WCCC is located in a city whose population places it as one of the largest 50 cities in the US, yet it is not among the top-5 most

131

populous cities in its own home state.

As highly desirable sites Midwest Research University, Western Comprehensive Commuter Campus and Small Private Liberal Arts College combined represent a diversity of Center and institutional characteristics, as well as Center involvement in instructional or research activities of the institution. Their diversity and general representativeness adds value to the project by illuminating commonalities of LGBTQ+ people across institutions, but also the significant impact that specific campus culture and climate can have on the individual students who attend.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS REGARDING CAMPUS CLIMATE:

MICROAGGRESSIONS AND COUNTERSPACES

To best describe the experiences of participants, the research first explores and explains spaces where participants reporting feeling excluded and included on campus, and then moves on to discuss the experiences of microaggression that students encounter on campus, as well as more positive experiences that they have and counterspaces that support them.

Analysis of the data took the form of open coding, described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as a process whereby "the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data" (p. 62). Open coding was used across interview transcripts to determine critical connections and meanings through the linkages of common experience, and similar participant understanding. From this process of open coding, two themes coalesced around campus climate: Participants described spaces on campus where resistance was encountered, and spaces on campus where support was common. These two themes will now be discussed more fully.

Campus Spaces of Resistance and Campus Spaces of Support

As students arrive on campus and explore their intellectual abilities and potentials, interests, passions and engage their aspirations, the campus climate affords places of

133

immediate and strong connection, and spaces of challenge and strong disconnection. For some students, the latter is provided in greater proportion to the prior. Campus climate is understood as the way that a person experiences the institution's culture (Peterson & Spencer, 2000). In particular, students who differ from the majority—such as those who represent racial minorities, are non-heteronormative, celebrate underrepresented faith traditions, or live with disabilities, to provide a few examples—may experience more obstacles to full inclusion and participation on campus. Therefore understanding the campus climate for marginalized people is critical for institutions that seek to create fully inclusive cultures supportive of student learning and development.

In this research, participants described campus spaces and experiences that excluded and marginalized them, as well as campus spaces and experiences where they felt included and supported. First, participants' experiences with campus spaces of resistance and campus spaces of support are described below, before discussion turns to explore and articulate microaggressions that participants encounter. Finally, the research describes counterspaces that participants find, create and engage to buffer negative aspects of campus climate.

Campus Resistance

LGBTQ+ students encounter campus attitudes, behavior and cultural assumptions that diminish or deride their fundamental self-understandings. They are frequently harassed emotionally and physically. They often experience intentional and unintentional microaggressions. They are told in a number of ways that who they are is unwelcome, unsafe or unvalued (Nadal et al., 2011). Participants described a number of places and spaces on campus where they found resistance to inclusion, and those spaces emerged as

134

eight sub-themes: Classrooms; academic departments and disciplines; athletics and recreation centers; residence halls and campus housing; fraternities and sororities; institutional leaders; peers; and individuals themselves. These eight sub-themes that characterize spaces of campus resistance are described and explored below through participants' experiences and reflections.

Classrooms. Some participants found classrooms to be neutral, or the experience of coming out or being out to be generally non-threatening. Char was one of these, and explained, "I mean, I don't think I would [disclose] much beyond just coming out, but I've never had too big of a problem with just coming out randomly to professors or whatever." She weaves her casual disclosure into everyday encounters rather than making pronouncements, "but I think that definitely in some classroom spaces I'm much more willing to be vulnerable in other ways beyond just coming out." Megan remains generally reserved about her identity, as well. "Sometimes, it's a little nerve racking to let a teacher know that you're gay. Most of the time you wouldn't have an incidence where you tell them, but occasionally it will come up in conversations," she shared.

Landon acknowledges that he is circumspect with faculty about being gay, but doesn't feel like he experiences specific pressure to be reserved, but that his identity may be less important in the context of a teaching and learning relationship. "So for example, if you're gonna talk to your professor, you're not going to wear shirts with sexually explicit things or you're not gonna say explicit things. And everyone does that to an extent," he explained indicating that individuals make critical choices about the degree of disclosure appropriate in any encounter. "Everyone behaves a certain way when they're trying to convey a certain image. So I don't feel like I'm singled out because I'm gay.

135

Because I have to tailor a message to the audience."

Ale maintained, however, that her expression was significantly curtailed:

> I think in classrooms, I have to be a lot more reserved. I don't like [pause] I think maybe when I make comments in support for the LGBTQ community, or say that I work at the [LGBT Center], people must assume that, "She's a lesbian or something…." I guess because I don't know how people are gonna react. I don't want someone to misjudge me–or not misjudge me–to make an assumption about me…. Especially professors I think, like is what I'm mostly concerned of. I don't want professors to treat me any differently after that, whether it be better, with more care or like tip-toe around what they're saying which professors have done like where they sort of like stumble on their words, when they're talking about the community because they don't wanna offend…. Actually, in one of my classrooms last semester, where one of the professors said something about the community and I held back a lot, and I just didn't say anything because the people in that classroom seemed to agree and so did he, so I felt like I would be outnumbered and I was in evening class and I just had a lot thoughts that went through my head and I just held back and I didn't say anything.

Ale is the type of student who squeezes all the learning possible from her classes, both living out loud and embracing the vulnerability that characterizes an openness to change and be changed through the experience of college. Yet the authentic relationships she wants to develop prevent her from the vulnerability and openness that facilitate the best learning. She makes decisions about what and when to disclose in thoughtful, informed ways. Like Ale, students often take the pulse of an academic environment, and weigh their options given the support or resistance they expect to find.

Hector's major in theater arts generally provides classroom contexts where his full authentic identity is welcome, but in core curriculum classes, he finds that he is sometimes left feeling "I don't know, for some reason I just felt like the environment kind of pushed me towards not being completely open about my identity." In this case, he described an introductory class in economics. "I guess it's also because there's not much opportunity for you to show your identity in an economics class, where everyone is kind

136

of discussing all these problems about like, supply and demand, and it's just like a different place."

For Jade, an ethnic studies major, Jade is used to exploring course content through the lens of identity, but some of her classroom environments feel restrictive. "I'm a member of the [honors] program. And it's very straight, white, upper middle class," she explained. "Nobody wants to talk about it. Nobody wants to talk about gender identity, sexuality… it's just a whole lot of erasure."

Megan described feeling disappointed when classroom content turned to "the discussion of being gay and it's just like, to hear people that obviously haven't gone through it talk about it, is kind of hard, especially when they're not doing a good job explaining it." She welcomes the ability to explore the disciplines through an identity lens, but when faculty or student treatments of related topics lack depth or nuance, she explained that "there's definitely been classes where I've just kind of bit my tongue and not said anything, or just kind of zoned out and not listened."

Jordan described a casual but insidious resistance to LGBTQ+ inclusion in classrooms characterized by faculty whose actions align with non-discrimination requirements, yet fail to embody the spirit of those policies. He shared an example, whereby technology limitations result in the use of a given or legal name on class rosters or online course systems rather than a preferred name that aligns with the student's gender. Use of the given or legal name can out the student and highlight the student's trans identity. Jordan notes that a faculty member might say, "I'm not being discriminatory, I have my roster and I'm just going off of my roster," but the impact is profound. This can create discomfort or foster peer relationship distance in some cases, or

put the student's safety at risk in others, particularly as students depart the classroom into less controlled environments. It's an "I will do the bare minimum" attitude that underserves students and institutional goals around access and inclusion.

Casual contact before, during or after class can detract and distract from the educational experience. Felicia described that in one of her classes, she and a friend "sit next to a couple of guys who talk, who don't ever really pay attention in class…. And like all the time, they're like, 'Dude, that's so gay. Like stop being a faggot.' And I'm just sitting there." The behavior isn't overtly threatening, but it is diminishing and insulting, and despite its persistence, Felicia feels like she "can't really say anything, do anything."

Shannon described her own frequent experiences in classrooms "hearing people talk, or hearing people talk in class to their classmates, and using sort of like this really inappropriate, and very rude, and very ignorant language really hurts." Working in a Center, she facilitates conversations and thinking about how students can and should step up to respond in the moment to confront bias and enact resistance. "And those are things I'm still processing on like ways that I can [respond]. It usually takes me like an hour. So it's like after the whole incident's done, 'What could I have said?'" Despite her good intentions, desire and training, she finds herself unable to speak up or speak out at times. "It's very complex. So when you're in a classroom and people say something that usually would be addressed if I was in this Center space," she says referring to our location within the campus LGBT Center, "I sometimes don't address it within that space because of the maybe demographics of the classroom. I feel like a minority or whatever. Or the teacher doesn't help to cultivate that sort of environment in the classroom." Shannon is reflective and thoughtful, one to think before she speaks and who carefully guards against

138

saying the wrong thing, or even the right thing the wrong way. This care with words and message may contribute to the challenge she feels in addressing microaggressions immediately. "But I think those things definitely need to be addressed," she expressed, "because I hear them quite often around campus."

Ale described being affected by comments a peer made in a course on child development. "One student specifically said that adoption for same-sex parents should definitely not be allowed." Such comments aren't entirely foreign, but Ale is aware that the literature effectively counters arguments that same-sex households developmentally disadvantage children. "It's surprising to hear it in a college classroom, but I think it's also like a reminder of the work that we have to continue to do," she acknowledges. Her disappointment, however, was situated with the faculty member's lack of response or challenge. She went on to explain:

> [The faculty member] sort of let the students respond, because a lot of the students responded, including myself. And [the peer who originally made the statements] was just sort of very much like, "Well that's what I think and other people are gonna think what they think." Along those words, that's what he said. And then the professor sort of was like, "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, blah blah blah," and then sort of changed the subject really quick. She didn't really take a stand herself, which in a sense I understood because she's a professor, and maybe she wanted to stay in a neutral side, but I feel that she should've spoken up, like she should've said something about how those are like rights. I don't know. I feel like she should've said something.

In this case, it wasn't a faculty attitude that informed the resistance, but may have been a lack of confidence or expertise in the topic, or preparedness to address the specific critique that was raised. Ale affirmed a general intentionality around inclusion that characterized this faculty member, saying "I don't feel like [the faculty member] was necessarily not supportive of the community, because we later again discussed gender,

and gender identity. And the way that she explained it, I think she did a good job." But the failure to address and redress questionable and refutable claims was disappointing and ultimately disrupted the learning environment for Ale.

For Jordan, the experience described by Ale is too common and incredibly troubling. "Because the faculty has so much power in that place," they also have the additional burden of responsibility to be aware and responsible for what is happening, and of the conversational and educational potentials that exist. "I can understand not wanting to reprimand or condemn or shame someone in a space for saying something, right?" Jordan affirms academic freedom in classrooms for faculty and students, and supports the goal of intellectual engagement that invites rigorous and contentious debate, but comments grounded in identity or identity assumptions that are unquestionably false or that simply reinforce cultural bias must be addressed. "You have to address it in some way or it just looks like it's complicity of silence saying, 'Oh what that student said was okay.' Or that, 'My heterosexist statement or whatever was okay.'" The failure to respond leaves students invested and engaged in their own identity development looking for and lacking critical support, "and so there's kind of this complicity of silence around how the microaggressions are occurring."

Some students described classroom treatment that was more overtly discriminatory based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. Megan described struggles to fit into peer determined workgroups where she perceives that others look to be in groups with others they perceive as similar, while she presents as an openly butch lesbian woman. "Group work in class is really one of the worst experiences, just because you never know how somebody is going to be," she explained. Most recently, she found

140

herself in a group of three women and a man, "and I felt like the guy was very standoffish towards me and didn't really like any of my ideas. But I don't know if it had anything to do with the way that I am or not." In another class, a faculty member asked students to pair up as she explained a project. Megan approached a peer, but felt like "when I first approached her about being my partner, she was just kind of [pause] like she didn't really want to be my partner. And she was just, I don't know, I just kind of got that vibe." Yet the two of them paired up, and ultimately "she didn't let it get in the way of our work, and I don't think she had any issues with it… I hate to judge because that's what I don't want people to do for me," but the encounter left her unsettled, and her discomfort in the learning environment detracted from her ability to focus fully on the projects and the learning outcomes.

Kenny has also had several experiences where faculty expectations failed to comport with campus policies. "I was in a makeup class here," he explained and a course project required that the student gather a number of professional appraisals of the student's work. The assignment indicated that "all of the references had to be of our same gender" which placed a significant burden on Kenny, who expresses across genders. The faculty member was recalcitrant until Kenny involved staff in the LGBT Center to provide support and question the requirement. In another experience, an apparel class felt limiting when Kenny's glam drag aesthetic ran counter to the preferences of those in charge, characterized by Kenny as "women that have been sewing for 50 plus years." Although he understood that "when you have an older demographic in [the rural Midwest], they didn't really understand much of the drag thing that I had going on." Kenny's artistic and creative vision was compromised, and his full self-expression

curtailed through these classroom experiences, and has led him to the difficult decision to shift majors from apparel design to communications.

Academic departments and disciplines. Several participants described academic departments or the cultures of disciplines to be unwelcoming. Veronica explained that "the science department is pretty heteronormative, white, things like that. So I don't feel exactly comfortable speaking to people in the biology department about these kinds of issues." Her experience is very different in the context of interactions that take place within Women's and Gender Studies where "I talk about it freely, because that's what the Women's Gender & Sexuality Studies people do, talk about gender and sexuality."

Yet Brett described his experience in Anthropology, where the prevailing attitude is "We deal with diversity all the time. We can't be doing anything wrong, because we're the diversity people. This is what we do. We like all people." This feeling of openness is characterized by an expertise that regrettably and ironically shuts down conversation and inquiry, "So it's been harder to work with them on certain issues" like the nature of gender, gender identity and gender expression. "So that's really hard to deal with when it's coming from my own department. I don't feel like I have a lot of power there. It's a very bad power dynamic."

"I guess it depends on where you are," explained Spryte who identifies as asexual and prefers to use they/them/their as pronouns. "In the engineering and STEM fields, you get a lot more of cold shoulder for being LGBT or trans, but in the liberal arts or something, you can get [pause] you get a lot more inclusive feel." Spryte shared that they often introduce themself and share pronoun preferences before turning in work so that feedback doesn't focus on grammar rules. In one class, Spryte approached the faculty

142

member after roll was called on the first day to clarify. They explained that "he goes, 'Oh, you just used gender neutral pronouns. I'm sorry, I'll change it,'" and made the notation on his course roster. This was a very different reaction than Spryte received in another classroom. "I did that to one of my professors in [my major department of] engineering and he was just like, 'That's not your legal name. You're a girl, deal with it.'"

Athletics and recreation centers. Spaces that cater to university athletics were described as challenging to navigate by some participants. "There are just some structural things that are set up solely upon the binary, right? So, just thinking about locker rooms and spaces that wasn't necessarily intended for a more diverse audience," explained Jordan. "But I think also just the culture of boys and girls' teams and the way in which their socialization as men and women are reinforced in a certain particular way can be really, really strong in athletics." Char shared that "I'm not an athlete and I don't spend a lot of time [at the athletic complex]. But I just [pause] especially in the changing room I just, I feel uncomfortable." She explained that this is "because it's usually dominated by or it seems to be dominated by a lot of straight women, so I feel kind of uncomfortable there."

Spryte described being challenged when they wanted to participate in a club sport using their preferred rather than legal name. Because of the physical contact and insurance requirements, the group organizer was recalcitrant in her demands:

> It wasn't really a reflection on the organization, unfortunately it was a reflection on the one person who was causing the problem, but it had to be taken to the organization level because there was nothing that I could do personally to that one, to try to get that one person to shift [the practice]. It was kind of a painful way to go through it. So, I ended up having to step out of that organization just because I didn't want to cause any more trouble. So, I still help out with them when they need it, but it's kind of hard to go back sometimes because I always

143

feel like I'm that kid that caused them to get red flagged by the university.

Spryte wasn't the only student whose ambiguous gender expression created obstacles to full participation in athletic endeavors. Max struggled to obtain a locker space within the gender inclusive locker room at the university recreation center. After the institution committed to and developed a more inclusive locker room space as an extension of trans awareness and inclusion work on campus, Max approached rec center staff to request a locker assignment. "And he looks at me and he goes, 'Do you need it?' And I was like and I said, 'Yes.' I was actually much more shy," he recalled, and the conversation continued as it escalated Max's discomfort. "And he goes, 'Well, can't you just use the women's locker room?' And I went, 'No. I'm not a girl.'" As he tells the story, Max is fidgety and frustrated. "And he went [pause] and there was just kind of like a pause and then he went, 'Okay. Let me see what I can do.'" The staff member then instructed a student assistant who was present for the interaction to "Get her name and her information and I'll get back to her when I can," using female pronouns in the face of both Max's masculine presentation and earlier statement that he was not a girl or woman. It was a clear and intentional microaggression and Max experienced hurt and anger.

After a week, Max emailed the staff member to inquire about resolution, and he acted as if he had no knowledge of the request or situation, and denied that gender-inclusive locker room space was available at all. When Max went to the recreation center to confirm for himself that the locker room was physically present, a hand-written sign reading "family locker room" had been taped over the official "all-gender locker room" signage. Furious now at his treatment and exclusion, Max made his way to the Dean of Students Office. There he encountered support and partnership, as the Dean's staff made

144

contact with rec center staff to accommodate Max's reasonable request. The request for locker space was granted, but Max did not receive acknowledgement or apology for the identity transgressions, the run-around or the extra time and effort required of him. Despite his willingness to continue to persist in his desire and demand for locker space in the gender-inclusive locker room, and his success in receiving the permanent locker assignment, the circumstance had a strong negative impact on Max's campus experience.

Residence halls and campus housing. Campus residence halls also served as spaces of resistance. For some students, housing operations were managed in ways that marginalized students based on identity, where others described peer cultures and interactions that reinforced marginalization. As a Center initiative, Brett has been reaching out and "helping the university navigate policies, so we're struggling with [housing] on how to get gender inclusive housing for students." Part of that is coming to terms with and answering critical questions about the operations of the institution, such as "what is the state policy? What is [the campus-level policy] about segregating by sex in [housing]? How do we overcome that? How do we provide inclusive housing for trans students that's in alignment with our non-discrimination policy?"

As a trans student, campus policy requires that Kent be housed by legal sex. Yet as a masculine-presenting person, this "makes showering, going to the bathroom and shaving, any of those kinds of things tend to be a little tense. Depending on the other individual" because he is a man using women's facilities. Kent is casually nonchalant about the requirement. "I personally don't care. You wanna leave the bathroom while I'm in here? More privacy for me. Go right on ahead." Yet it is clear that despite his bravado, he would prefer to live in an alternate and more accepting environment, where he

145

wouldn't stand out as a man, or be immediately and always outed as a transman by virtue of his mere presence in the space.

Andi found better accommodations in her experience with campus housing. "I'm living in an apartment… but with that, they're gonna block off my roommate instead of making me have one, because most of the time [apartment rooms] are doubles, but they'll make mine single and it won't cost any extra," she explained. "So that's the accommodation that I personally got. I could have a roommate if I wanted to. It would have to be a male-bodied person because rooms are designated by sex due to some kind of policy." Despite meeting her safety and privacy needs, in some respects, the accommodation has been experienced by Andi as unnecessarily punitive and detrimental. "It's kind of like an isolation almost, to an extent. Because of the sex segregated policy, you're not allowed to be with female-bodied people or gender-variant people that are female bodied." Yet Andi further unpacks her experiences with administration to illustrate how those interactions make her feel. "They'll help you but I never felt like normal around them. I've never felt like the trans identity was something that [pause] it was more tolerated and 'We can help you with this,' kind of situation, rather than acceptance and understanding." Like Kent, her acceptance of the situation is belied by her disappointment that she isn't fully appreciated or welcomed for who she is. With resignation, she shared "I don't know, it's a double-edged sword. It's good, but it could be worse it could be better."

Megan experienced barriers to the support she should have received from the Resident Assistant on her floor. She explained that this staff member "would tell me that she wasn't okay with it but she never treated me any differently than anybody else

because of it, but she was really religious, so her personal views were that she wasn't okay with it." This made it challenging for Megan to have any kind of real relationship with the staff member, or to engage in floor community building activities and efforts that she facilitated. Likewise, when Kenny approached his RA for support around his identity on the floor, "he was like, 'I don't really know how to deal with this. I'm sorry.' It was pretty much 'You're on your own.'"

Many other participants shared experiences of intolerance and marginalization that took place at the hands of fellow students in residence hall and housing environments. Chelsea related that "somebody wrote 'fag' on my white board thing, I wasn't I wasn't bothered by it. I was like, 'Really? That's ridiculous.' But I understand that other people would be, some other people could be." Tara experienced avoidance by other students whose perceptions of her identity led to a refusal to share bathroom facilities with her because "I am either supportive of the gay community or am gay, because rainbow flag, rainbow door decorations. So, I've had someone walk out of the bathroom once they saw me in there."

Felicia's experience with her first-year roommate was infused with a number of animosities, but she felt much of it was grounded in her pansexual identity. Other students would report her roommate talking her down behind her back. A mutual acquaintance shared that the roommate and her friends from the floor "keep talking about it and they think it's disgusting and weird." Felicia resolved to "set myself on auto-pilot and just get through the next two months of living with her" which was personally challenging, but ultimately seemed to be the path of least resistance. "Obviously, there are other problems my roommate and I have, but apparently they had always thought that

147

I had [pause] I don't know, I guess they always just talked really negative things about my sexuality." She chose a coed learning community for her sophomore year, but still "there was a lot of talk between the guys going around like, 'Dude, this person's a faggot.' And so-and-so, like jokingly." She explained that while she knew it was a figure of speech rather than an attack, "it was still kind of weird to hear that. I guess. I understand that it's a joke but it's strange for me to hear that word tossed around like it doesn't really matter type of thing." What was further disorienting for Felicia was that "ironically enough, those guys are my friends. I actually got along better with the guys in my learning community than I did with the girls. But it was still really strange to hear that word just always tossed around."

Landon remarked that during his first year when he lived in the dorms "I think that my sexual orientation kind of prevented me from making a lot of friends there." While he wasn't the only gay student on the floor, "I was the only out person who was gay. But there were two who found out they were gay later on. Or at least they came out to me." Yet as the only openly gay person on this floor, Landon explains that "I think I received most of like the vitriol compared to all the other people who were gay."

Fraternities and sororities. While Chelsea hadn't experienced marginalization herself, she explained that "I know people who do not fit into the binary as well as I do; they do face a lot of aggression and hostility, especially from fraternities and sororities." Kent reported that when walking on campus "the only time I really don't feel comfortable is anytime after 5:00 PM, in the little island where all the fraternity and sorority houses are. That's when things start to get a little hairy and uncomfortable." Explaining further, he shared that "my palms get sweaty and my heart starts to race a little bit. Sometimes I'll

just take the long way home so I don't have to walk through that area." He worries about how other students experience him as a transman who is of smaller stature, because "when you're intoxicated and you're not making good decisions, and you see somebody who's different, you don't know how people are going to react."

G explained that her experience as a member of a chapter left her feeling that it's "probably one place where I feel like I would be very guarded. Because there's so much social cliques, there's so much, like you have to do this to prove yourself, stuff like that." For her, the culture was not a good fit, and she maintains that "I don't think that would be something that I would go out of my way of being around is being around the Greek system, just because it is mainly very, very binary and heteronormative." Yet to be fair, she acknowledges that "I don't necessarily think that it's non-inclusive, 'cause I know that we do have a gay fraternity here, and I know that there is some people who are in the Greek system, who are LGBT-identified."

Similarly, Craig who is affiliated with a chapter, doesn't feel excluded, but notes that his LGBT identity creates distance between himself and his chapter. As someone who uses humor to relate to others, he explained "I know that my audience, the context in which I'm in, they won't understand what [gay cultural references] mean. So I'll have to explain it, and then the joke's over anyway." The reaction he described is one of indifference more than disapproval. "So then it's kinda tough, just because I know my audience is different. But not so much where I feel like I have to butch myself up, or check myself." He believes his brothers are fairly open to his identity, yet he acknowledged, "I do try to be aware of where I am, and my talking topics are definitely different depending upon where I am."

Campus leadership. Participants drawn from Center staff or to whom Centers report spoke of resistance encountered as a function of institutional systems. Jordan encounters resistance when he tries to draw out the microaggression experiences that students have in classrooms, and the ways that faculty can be more inclusive. "It's nice and awesome when you are on your side of the campus and you're doing stuff with students," but there is a double standard "once you start telling faculty and upper administrators what to do or what they should be doing, then it gets a little bit like, 'Okay, that's nice for the students, but the same rules doesn't really apply over here.'" Sheryl explained that:

> for any of these issues related to diversity inclusion, the issue cannot move any faster than the leadership is willing to move with it. And so, institutional leadership at some levels, impacts the rate of change that one can experience on a campus. And so, that's a piece that's yet to be seen.

That's why the selection of campus leaders who champion inclusion at all levels is so critical in her eyes. "I'd rather be expending the energy on doing the work as opposed to convincing people that the work is important work to do" because "all it takes is one leader, significant leader saying, 'We don't need to do this,' and it is vulnerable. Another reason why you need to be closely aligned with the academic mission of the institution."

Eric illustrated the point by describing an institutional leader whose former capacity in politics leaves a record filled with divisive rhetoric which becomes "an obstacle for students wanting to come here and all different students, not just LGBTQ students. We find that our undocumented students have gone deep into the closet because of his position on undocumented students." This institutional leader remains silent in his capacity, declining to make statements that reify or refute those former positions such

150

that "all students that are from diverse backgrounds really are struggling right now at [the institution] because of his positions in the past and his silence of the present."

Peers. Many participants identified feeling marginalized through experiences with peers. "I think that's why I'm not out as trans on campus," remarked Sam. "I think I'm mostly concerned about the way I am seen on campus, and if and how coming out as trans would impact relationships I have with some of my friends." Tara shared that "I have a friend who identifies as genderqueer and he's very fem presenting, so just the looks he gets. It's not like they're saying anything, but they're condemning him with their eyes and it makes me so angry."

Among Carlos's friends, he sometimes hears peers use pejorative words and phrases, "No homo," "That's gay" and the like. He also noted that "in some of the events, you see people make facial remarks when people are presenting and talking about things, so you know that, like this is horrible, maybe like the faces of disgust like, 'Argh.'"

Chelsea had several casual dates with an international student from a country that criminalized LGBTQ+ people. She explains that when she came out as pansexual, "he was really concerned, and he was angry… he was just very hostile, like 'you don't understand, you're gonna die' and 'are you sure you wanna live in this life?'" While the relationship was already a non-starter, she acknowledges that she has had a similar experience "a couple different times with international students that I've come out with, and I understand that is just possible where they come from and their culture and I'm okay with that." Chelsea is respectful and understanding. "When it's time to fight for what I believe in, I'll do that, but I'm not gonna infringe on somebody else's culture, if they're just gonna sit there and be like, 'Well I don't agree with this.'"

Sam experienced an apathetic response to acts of campus intolerance, such as the marking of a campus building with hate speech graffiti. "There was a campus discussion about it, but nobody went," he explained. Students also get so wrapped up in their own activities, they fail to branch out and seek new points of view or experiences. With regards to LGBTQ+ themed events, "there are very few events where you're getting new people coming, he observed, "so, I think it's been really great, but it doesn't have visibility on campus."

Like Marcus, Jade observed that students sometimes just turn off when confronted with new ways of thinking, or show disinterest because they believe they already reflect the inclusion being explored. As an educational panelist, Jade reports that some students will seem disinterested in the conversation, and then remark that "'This is great, but I have a gay brother, so it wasn't beneficial to me.' Things like that. Which is very minimizing." She finds disappointment in the attitude or assumption that the whole of LGBTQ+ experiences "could be exemplified in this one experience of this one gay white man. So, there's things like that. I know I'm constantly checking people."

Individuals themselves. Several participants noted that they, themselves, served as obstacles to their full participation as LGBTQ+ people. Sam, for instance, acknowledged that his decision not to be open about his trans identity was mostly grounded in social concerns, and the ways that his relationships would be affected. "I think I'm mostly concerned about the way I am seen on campus," he explained. "I don't know if it's an institutional thing, or it's a personal thing, but I think it's probably more on the personal side."

Hector expressed reluctance to engage with campus religious life seeing it as "a

152

place that just makes me more wary and shuts me down sometimes to express myself. But I think that's more of my own ideas." Despite growing up a strict Catholic and finding comfort in his faith, he acknowledges "going to church, it's like, it's just a very special ritual where like you need to hide so many things. Because it's so sacred and, yeah, it's like you cannot show yourself fully."

Mary reported being so invested in her developing LGBTQ+ identity, that she worries her constant chatter about it will alienate peers. "I get really excited about it. But also I'm like don't just be taking about your queer shit all the time. People are gonna get annoyed. But it's never out of a feeling like it's not safe or something. It's more that I don't want to be annoying."

Campus Support

Engelken (1998) affirms that a campus must provide resources and spaces supportive of LGBTQ+ students. "[LGBTQ+] students should find themselves reflected in materials through the campus—in library acquisitions, class texts, magazines on sale in the bookstore, and professionals' offices… [and] there must be an 'interrelation of campus resources' in order to serve students well" (p. 24-5). Major sources of support comes from inclusion of LGBT themes interwoven through the curriculum, interpersonal opportunities and the presence of role models. Participants described a number of places and spaces on campus where they found acceptance and support, and those spaces emerged as four sub-themes: classrooms, majors and academic departments; peers and friend networks; and student affairs and support service areas including the Dean of Students Office, health and counseling services, identity centers, campus spiritual and religious life, athletics and safe zone or ally programs. These four sub-themes that

characterize spaces of campus support are described and explored below through participants' experiences and reflections.

Classrooms, majors and academic departments. Students expressed that classrooms and majors served to allow them to explore and express LGBTQ+ identity. For instance, Mary shared "I'm an English major, so we read a lot of stuff that I feel related to sometimes. I feel like English is one of the few disciplines where you're allowed to really bring your own experiences to the discussion." Tara noted that in her major situated in the college of liberal arts and humanities, "All the [faculty and staff] that I've had are very accepting, so if I wear something that says 'Pride' or have something with the HRC logo on it, I don't get weird looks from them. They're totally accepting of that."

Sam's experience of support with faculty in his major was significant. "Queer faculty have been really important, I think in me learning about myself. I'm a [Women's, gender and sexuality studies] major, so that's been pretty relevant to the department, and I think that's been a really great experience for me." Veronica, too, feels that she can express and articulate her identity openly with her faculty and in my major classrooms. "I talk about it freely, 'cause that's what the Women's gender & sexuality studies people do, talk about gender and sexuality." In both cases, students expressed that the choice of major was informed by an interest grounded in the student's own experience of marginalization. Veronica explained "I feel like it's easier to talk to them about being LGBTQ and like talking to them about stresses of being LGBTQ on campus 'cause they know how it feels"

Megan's major of sociology also lends itself to a general openness. She shared

154

that "I mean, we have [sociology] classes like sociology of gender, sociology of sexuality. So, for the most part, I've never had a problem with a sociology teacher or being afraid to express how I am to a sociology teacher."

Yet accepting and affirming spaces were not limited to perhaps predictably supportive programs, faculty or classrooms such as those in women's studies, gender and sexuality studies, psychology, sociology, and liberal arts and humanities. Spryte discussed finding considerable support from faculty in their engineering program who were supportive of a study abroad program that coalesced through a sexual orientation and gender identity lens. "the School of Biomedical Engineering is actually sponsoring me this summer to go abroad and work with ACT UP in New York, and ACT UP in Paris and then also go to Amsterdam." Eric noted that the veterinary medicine program "was one of the most progressive and early adopters of safe zone training, and have always been a very progressive diversity and inclusion agency on this campus."

G organized a panel discussion of LGBT-identified scientists on her campus to promote the visibility and potential for LGBTQ+-identified folks to succeed in STEM fields. She invited the chair of her major department, biology, to attend and was pleasantly surprised to see that she did. "I talked to her about it, and she said that it was interesting, that she would like to get more involved" with campus inclusion efforts. G's experience articulates the value that a positive interaction with even one faculty member can have for an LGBTQ+ student.

Additional participants also made special note of the value that individual faculty connections bring to them, and the significant positive benefits of connecting with even one professor around LGBTQ+ identity. Sam stated that "Queer faculty have been really

155

important, I think in me, learning about myself" and Hector described campus safe space in "the professors that I know very well and have shown me support." Shannon's strong support from faculty also provided invaluable. She explained that "I feel like I can openly express different aspects because I'm just a person who's really close to my professors in that way." Her connection to her advisor, who also identifies as LGBTQ+ has been especially important to her because "I didn't have anyone to offer sort of advice in that area or who was openly identified with the community in my family"

Max unexpectedly but pleasantly encountered LGBTQ+ faculty in a first year course. "I took painting I as mine, but I'm not an art major," he shared, noting that the faculty member of the course became his academic advisor until a permanent advisor was determined. So it felt incredibly affirming when "even my first year course professor [pause] that was just kinda like a cool interaction with the school that she herself is queer, and like she talks about her wife and their kids and stuff."

"In psych[ology] of gender", Lindsey explained she's "at a 400-level knowledge of this information. I have all of the theory. And some people are hearing, in my class– the person sitting next to me–is hearing for the first time that sex and gender are different." Lindsey values that she can be frank and authentic with the course's faculty member who also serves as her advisor, and with whom she can commiserate when peers seem to lack fundamental understandings of basic issues round sexual orientation and gender identity. "She and I can talk about how awful it is."

As a trans student, Kent described that "I feel like that's one way that I've definitely been affirmed, is the climate with the professors on campus" and the mostly positive experiences that he has had with faculty practices of inclusion and respect about

preferred name preferences and pronoun use.

Faith described feeling affirmed in her intersectional identity as she encountered classroom material through the facilitation of a faculty member who handled the material and conversation deftly:

> Well, one of the things that gives me a really unique experience is that I'm also a Christian. And not normally so, I'm a pastor. And so, I find that for most people that presents a dichotomy. And it isn't for me, but for most people it seems that way. And most people assume that Christianity is gonna be very conservative and anti-homosexual and things like that. And I was in my freedom of speech class this semester, and [Professor L] was talking about Prop 8 as part of our class discussion. And she was talking about how a lot of Church communities and Church leadership had come out [to support gay marriage]. I thought was so cool was that she said, "Some Christians hold these views." And I was like, "Wow! That's really cool!" And so, I felt like it was a safe place to have my faith and my orientation because I could talk about being gay in the class or I could talk about being Christian in the class and it was all okay. I just thought it was really, really encouraging for me.

In Faith's case, the faculty member didn't and didn't need to take a personal position of support, but rather used the space of the classroom to affirm the diversity of support for an issue in a way that reframed it more accurately, departing from tropes to posit the complexity of the issue. As a student who lives that complexity, this struck home in a particularly meaningful way for Faith.

Peers. Participants also described finding support among peers. Other students within the LGBTQ+ identity spectrum and those beyond were described in terms of their acceptance. Lindsey has found community in a gathering space adjacent to the Center. "It's a quiet, nice space where, for the most part, queer people come to hang out at night and work on homework, or talk and not work on homework." And Char similarly described a social group that coalesced around queer identity and met "basically every single Friday afternoon... and it was like a solid group of maybe seven queer people,

157

almost all, like, either, woman-identified or trans-identified, and we just were able to connect." As one of the seven in Char's group, Mary highlighted its informal value as well, explaining that "We just sit on the couches and just eat snacks and talk about ourselves [laughter] and it's really great."

Landon has found community among other LGBTQ+ people on his campus, as well. "I feel like when I'm in a group of gay people, we make the space, the safe space." As an asexual person, Spryte struggled to find others with whom they could connect. Center involvement ultimately led to an informal network. "I actually ended up meeting four or five other aces. And we were like, 'Yay! We have people!'" they shared. Simple numbers has created some solidarity, provided company and affirmed identity for Spryte even though their best friends are not drawn from among other aces.

Participants described feeling affirmed by peers who fall outside the community of LGBTQ+ people, as well. Sam described his general perception of openness on the part of fellow students. "In terms of the student body, I think everybody is like open to anybody's identity, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're willing to do things about it or for it or with it." His point is to highlight a trend of passive acceptance that is also apathetic to direct engagement or growth in and around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity among heterosexuals. It's an attitude characterized by the sentiment "I got no problems, but I don't want anything more to do with it," he explained.

Felicia was nervous to come out to her roommate, who hailed from a conservative state. "But, I ended up telling her and she was like, 'My mom is gay. Don't worry about it.' Which was really nice. And then after that I just slowly started coming out to a lot of different people." After not being out in high school, her experience with her roommate,

and then with others, meant a great deal to her. And despite her family still being

somewhat "iffy" with regards to her sexual orientation, her experience with peers has led

her to perceive that "coming out in college was fun."

Brett's advocacy work has resulted in being featured for his experience through

campus media. The resulting response from the campus has been heartening, as he

explained:

> I've been interviewed a few times by the student newspaper, and I've received
> good feedback from people I've never even met. On campus, our email addresses
> are public, and so one of the last times I was in the newspaper to talk about trans-
> inclusive health insurance, I got lots and lots of emails from people I've never met
> saying, "We're really excited for you. Please let us know what we can do to help.
> By the way I work in this division," or "I work in this office." And so those things
> were really, really good to see.

Student Affairs and support services. Participants described efforts by a

number of student affairs and support service areas to recognize and affirm the value and

presence of LGBTQ+ people. The research reflected experiences of students who

received support from the Dean of Students, health and counseling services, identity

centers, spiritual and religious life, residential life, and safe zone groups or ally projects.

Dean of Students Office. Max found that the Dean of Students advocated on his

behalf to help him navigate institutional obstacles related to his trans identity. When he

encountered resistance to the use of recreation center space, he turned to the Dean of

Students Office for support, and found the situation was quickly resolved in his favor

through their intervention. And when he chose to transition to a preferred name, a

meeting with the Dean of Students offered him perspective around issues that he hadn't

considered. After affirming that a preferred name change would result in updates to class

rosters and institutional systems, but not to those that require a legal name, such as

government reports, the Dean raised an important issue. Max recalls the Dean noting "the thing that does mean though is that, that's the name that will also get for mail home. So, does your family know?" This invited some valuable discussion about Max's home life and family acceptance, and conveyed care on behalf of the Dean and the institution that was powerful for Max. While the family issues raised were not particularly challenging in Max's case, it affirmed his instinct to send other trans students to the Dean's office for support because he felt strongly that they would be taken care of and their best interests would be served.

Health and counseling services. Faith's experience with a campus doctor countered perceptions that she had heard about their openness to LGBTQ+ identity. "I've heard from some people that they're kind of judgmental and not so inclusive over there. But that wasn't my experience," she explained. Consulting with the physician around general sexual health and wellness, Faith was open about her lesbian sexual orientation. "As I talked about it, I said 'She this,' and 'She that.' And he didn't act any way about it at all like there was anything not normal." The impression that has lasted has been one of support, and Faith encourages LGBTQ+ peers to openly make use of campus health services.

Brett described a leadership transition that changed the face of health service advocacy on his campus. "The student health center, for instance, we got a new director, and she was on board with getting trans-inclusive health insurance. That was something that was immediately on her agenda." It was both powerfully symbolic, but also represented a significant shift in essential care available for trans students. But a change related to emotional safety was just as important for Brett. "Another thing on her agenda

was getting rid of all the religious paraphernalia and items that were in physicians' and healthcare providers' offices, 'cause their offices are also their exam rooms." While Brett affirms the value of personal spiritual fulfillment, he notes that its expression can be a barrier to openness, especially for students whose marginalization has felt grounded in religious intolerance.

Kent reported receiving essential services on campus related to his gender identity. "I've actually been seeing a therapist on campus for gender therapy, for hormone replacement therapy and stuff like that." And inclusion of these services within the campus insurance coverage is important too. "If you're on the student health insurance it's just, it's pretty much all completely free" he explained. Andi's perception of support extended even further. "They use preferred names and preferred pronouns. So, that's I feel included and I feel like they respect who I am, and who I am both on the outside and the inside and medically and psychologically."

Yet other students weren't as enthusiastic. Char shared that "I think the counselors on campus have been helpful for me. I've seen a couple of different counselors, and it's always kind of a mixed bag. But yeah, I felt supported through counseling." Like Char, Felicia reported receiving support from counselors, but her enthusiasm was tempered. "It's like, there's a counselor I don't really know. You're supposed to be supportive about my sexuality and stuff, but it's like I don't really know if they actually are, type of thing." The lack of a context and existing rapport makes it more difficult for Char to trust that the acceptance she receives is genuine and authentic. Yet the counselors express support and students ultimately find value in their interactions.

"When I was thinking about transferring and having like a lot of really emotional

161

problems with that," recounted Ale, "I went to the [counseling center], and they were really great. The counselor I had there was extremely nice and helped me through so much. Like incredible amounts." While Ale's LGBTQ+ identity was only tangential to the support she received through the counseling center, she believes their practice could be improved through directed outreach to LGBTQ+ people because "I actually don't even see the Counseling Centers reach out specifically to the LGBT community." Trevor notes that on his campus, the counseling center does exactly this sort of outreach. "On Wednesdays, they host a LGBTQ support network" right in the LGBT Center, establishing rapport and answering basic questions while they encourage students with more significant needs to make an appointment and connect with a specific mental health professional.

Hector and Landon also reported making use of counseling center staff, and ultimately it was a contact with a counselor that led Spryte to seek out the LGBT Center and get involved in the LGBTQ+ community on campus. Shannon reported that "when I was going through my own, sort of like, coming out process [counseling services] was very helpful for that."

Finally, Max noted the value and campus presence and programming of student groups related to health and wellness. He described a "voices of mental health activism group" that "works a lot on intersections of mental health with other identities. So, they actually helped facilitate a thing on mental health and queerness. So, that was really cool," he recalled.

162

Identity and culture centers. Participants often referenced meaningful

connections between LGBT Centers and other culture centers on campus in addressing

intersectionality or furthering shared social justice aims. Brett explained that "there's a lot

of cross-programming with like the Latino Cultural Center and The Native American

Education and Cultural Center" and Ale referenced feeling equally comfortable at the

LGBT Center and at the multicultural center, as well as at programs co-sponsored by the

two. Carlos explained efforts in the multicultural center to raise awareness about

LGBTQ+ oppression. "In the multicultural center, there's like a little poster board that

talks about people saying 'no homo,' or, 'that's gay,' and stuff like that," he explained.

This is important because students in this space may not have a broad sensitivity to

diversity issues, or empathy to groups with identities outside of their own frame of

reference.

> We have people coming in too, they're trying to find a role, trying to fit in and
> figure out how am I gonna try to put myself into this culture, like when I'm in my
> home culture this is how I act. And so, we gotta take in newer people and just let
> them know, like "hey, this is just the same thing. It's someone calling you a stick,
> or it's the same thing as calling you a wetback." You know what I mean? It's the
> same kind of emotions that get brought up when these terms are used. But you
> know, they are. I wanna say that those people just need some education.

Carlos contends that intolerance is countered by education, and through the cultivation of

empathy, to which he is committed as an identity center staff member, and as he makes

connections with peers who share a racial identity, to further practices of respect around

sexual orientation and gender identity. In his view, educational collaborations between

and among centers are essential in meeting shared social justice outcomes.

Religious and spiritual life. Jordan shared the importance for some students of cultivating intersections around faith and sexual orientation and gender identity, noting that campus religious life "does a great job of really getting students to connect to their values and what they've experienced and what they've lived through and why are they here and what do they want to do with their life." Helping students make meaning of their experiences and find value in themselves and their aspirations is critical to building self-efficacy and self-esteem. "Especially, if they have other religious identities that intersect, but they find that space very comforting and rewarding for them."

Residence life and campus housing. Participants also shared experiences of LGBTQ+ inclusion related to residential life and campus housing. Megan expressed anxiety about living in campus housing because "going into the dorms, you never know what kind of roommate you're gonna get. I was very lucky, my roommate had no problems with me being a lesbian," she explained. While she did encounter other students who did have experiences of exclusion or intolerance in residential contexts, she reports "I never had any problems with my roommate, or anyone really in my dorm. I had a very good dorm experience, I didn't really have any issues with it, or anything like that." Spryte recounted a similar experience.

> I was really lucky. I just had a very understanding floor. I was on a floor of all girls…. And I came out [as asexual], I went to my RA and I was like, "I technically shouldn't be on this floor anymore." And she's like, "Well if you're comfortable still living here, you can. We can work out situations if you don't wanna use the restroom with other people." I just didn't want to make anybody else awkward. So I offered to let the floor know. And I did it and no one really cared on my floor."

Aiden saw value in the inclusion of housing staff in the safe zone program. "They'll take what they've learned from the allies training and put it into what they call

'potty talks' which is the information on the back of the stall door in a community bathroom in the dorms," he explained. As peer leaders, housing staff have significant influence with students, and so their participation has powerful potential. "They're putting everything into action as soon as we tell them this is an important thing to do." Char agreed that "overall [residence life] really intentionally trains RAs to be able to support queer students." In her second year, Char came to consider her RA as a friend but she noted that "I should honor that and realize that she was probably supporting me in ways that she learned how to do through [her training in residence life]."

Kenny has experienced the difference of living on a floor with safe zone trained staff and the alternative. "There's been a clear and distinct difference between the way that my RA that was trained talked to me and the way that my RA that was not trained talked to me. It was like day and night." Brett felt that efforts at improving the environment for LGBTQ+ people in campus housing were having an impact. "I think that the student housing on campus is not necessarily a place to hang out [for LGBTQ+s], but I think that the students are starting to see a conscious effort to reduce microaggressions." Andi was also balanced in his assessment of residence hall life, noting "I don't know, it's a double-edged sword. It's good but, it could be worse, it could be better."

Athletics and campus recreation. Jordan shared that "I think students are okay with feeling like they can be queer and an athlete here" and Max explained that "I guess it depends on the team. I know more from like the women's teams because I've got a lot of women friends who are athletes." He posited the example of an LGBTQ+ friend on campus who "plays on two club sports, and she's the captain of both of them." None of the study participants talked about participating in or having knowledge of an out

165

LGBTQ+ presence on varsity or high profile teams, yet LGBTQ+ people did find enclaves of acceptance and inclusion within athletic communities.

G discussed how she "actually got introduced to rugby and that's how my LGBT experience started in college." As a member of the team, G was one of the first open and out members, but found that over the course of her experience, the team gained more out women, and some members came out, such that a significant cohort was LGBTQ+ identified. "I joined the [college] women's rugby team and I played for about five years. I want to say that was my main general experience" of LGBTQ community.

Yet beyond participation in organized sports, athletic spaces were described as spaces of inclusion. Brett was surprised to find that "there are gender inclusive locker rooms at the new [campus recreation center], which is crazy. I couldn't even imagine what those would be like. So there are inclusive spaces." The consideration of gender inclusion in the planning process made a significant impression and helped affirm Brett's feelings of welcome and belonging in the space.

Safe zones and ally programs. Participants also reported feeling included through the presence of and involvement in safe zone and ally programs, often coordinated through student affairs. Karla explained that the development of a broadly targeted safe zone program that looks at oppression intersectionally:

> is another way that we were strategic in creating something that allowed folks across campus to learn what it meant to be an ally across all kinds of difference and create something where they sign up to do ongoing education for themselves to learn how to advocate, to create inclusive spaces and all of that.

Eric, as well, spoke to the immense value of broadly enacted safe zone training:

> I think the access to information and the readily available staff and allies that people could go and speak to, creates an environment where students feel safe

166

enough to ask questions, engage in conversations that they have never been able to elsewhere, and whether that's with peers or with individuals who are employees or just outside community members, I think they're making deep connections here that they don't find in their home spaces.

Kent leveraged this network of support as he nervously anticipated the challenges of living in campus housing. To alleviate his concerns, he emailed the president of the LGBT Club. That person referred him to staff in the Dean of Students who provided a contact in housing. This person was able to provide helpful information and advice to Kent. Some students would see this as being passed around but for Kent it represented the existence of "a really big support system of allies on campus compared to what I've heard from friends who have attended other Universities and things like that, and compared to what I experienced in my own home town."

Safe zone and ally programs are also useful because their existence allows the institution to respond to acts of intolerance quickly through educational efforts. Brett described a situation where a department became acutely aware that they were failing to serve the needs of LGBTQ+ students in their courses. "We had [Center staff] come in and do a huge safe zone training for the faculty in that department, set the tone for how to work with LGBTQ students." Attendance was strong, and the participants engaged in the training and continue to follow-up actively. "That was really cool to come in and have institutional intervention into a department and they were all on board with it." Yet had considerable time passed between the ability of the institution to respond during the teachable moment, the opportunity for engagement might have diminished.

Beyond campuswide ally development initiatives, a few participants spoke of other efforts more narrowly targeted along the same goals. Chelsea described the ongoing

development of "an ally thing for the Greek system which I think it's phenomenal, and hopefully they can help spread the word and just make it more inclusive."

Ale has personally benefitted from involvement. The training has prepared her for "issues that I face really in regards to the community, and how to handle them myself, and where to get help and anything like that, and who to discuss it with." Similarly for Veronica, participation in safe zone "has definitely helped me not only learn how to be an ally to others but also myself, because sometimes the things that are most hurtful to you, you do it yourself. And I definitely struggled with that, for some time."

<center>Microaggressions and Counterspaces</center>

As LGBTQ+ students navigate educational institutions, they encounter people and spaces that resist them and others that support them. They also encounter obstacles and barriers to their full authentic participation grounded in policy and practice, in campus climate and culture, and in encounters with others. Previously, consideration has been given to the phenomena of microaggressions, and the critical impact that the daily experience of microaggressions has in determining student outcomes (Sue, 2010). Through sharing their experiences and perspectives, participants described the routine and frequent experience of marginalization based on sexual orientation and gender identity across campus – in classrooms and among faculty in academic departments; in utilizing facilities such as campus recreation centers and housing; and in structured organizational interactions with peers as well as unstructured casual interactions.

Attention was also paid to the people and places on campus where LGBTQ+ students find support and acceptance and campus. Characterized as counterspaces (Case & Hunter, 2012; Solorzano et al.,, 2000; Yosso & Lopez, 2010), these campus enclaves

<center>168</center>

of support allow students to authentically, fully and safely express their sexual orientation and gender identity. In addition to LGBT Centers which provide unmatched levels of support for LGBTQ+ students and whose efforts are discussed more fully in Chapters 5 and 6, participants described finding communities of support among faculty and in classrooms, among peers and friend networks, and through interactions with student support services within student affairs and beyond.

The following discussion will explain some of the ways that participants experience, understand and address the microaggressions that they encounter on campus. In addition to the everyday indignities that characterize the core experience of microaggressions, participants described microaggressions characterized by assumptions and by passive disengagement around issues of LGBTQ+ oppression as additional modes of microaggressive marginalization. Conversation then turns to the impact of microaggressions on students, and some common responses that participants employ in coping with them, such as minimizing or addressing them.

Microaggressions

Sue (2010) describes microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (p. 24) bounded by characteristics such as race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious belief, ability, socio-economic status, etc. Readers are invited to consider invisible messages that are both verbal and non-verbal, as well as delivered environmentally. As recipients of microaggressions, individuals have the daily experience of determining to what degree their experience of microaggressions is accurate–whether they actually happened, were perceived or imagine–and how and

169

whether to respond.

Sheryl posited that microaggressions are "the things that you see written on posters, it's the comments that you hear, some of it is the ignorance that gets carried around in the back of your backpack that you don't know about until you encounter it." Shifting from the concrete to the metaphorical, she continued, "you know what I'm saying? People bring biases, but you don't really know that they're carrying them until they act out on them." And acting out may be intentional or unintentional. "So, I'd say there's resistance to this issue as well as any issue related to diversity inclusion. It's all around you. You just don't know exactly where it is."

Participants shared many campus experiences characterized by microaggression and resistance to their full participation as LGBTQ+ people as previously explored. Students experienced reluctance to self-expression in classroom contexts, as described by Landon, Ale or Hector. Others reported class interactions with peers reflective of intolerance, such as those described by Shannon or Kenny. Spryte and Max experienced resistance to their use of recreation facilities based on gender identity. Kent and Andi experienced housing accommodations unsupportive of their trans identities. Felicia and Landon reported hostility and distance from peers in housing based on sexual orientation. Chelsea, G and Craig described feeling marginalized in fraternity and sorority communities. And many participants, including Carlos, Sam, Tara and Chelsea described peer interactions characterized by microaggression.

Beyond overt acts of intolerance or exclusion, participants also experienced microaggressions related to assumptions and erasure or to the unwillingness of peers to extend themselves to understanding the experience of oppressed or marginalized people

as related to LGBTQ+ identity. Discussion will now turn towards these experiences of microaggression, before considering the ways that students are impacted by and cope with them.

Microaggressions characterized by assumptions. A common microaggression described by participants involved heteronormative assumptions that resulted in partial or full erasure of LGBTQ+ identity, or that shut down or diminished the ability of students to express and articulate themselves fully and authentically. Max was a participant that noted "within the student body that there's very little assumption about sexuality." Yet his experience ran counter to that of many other students who experienced frequent assumptions or erasures.

Other students expressed frustration that the complexity of their self-understanding was minimized or that they were compartmentalized or collapsed into traditional identity archetypes. Mary explained "I just don't like assumptions. I don't like that I'm either assumed to be straight or lesbian and never bi." Similarly Veronica shared that "I have been misgendered several times. And I know that is definitely a big thing for other people. I'm a pretty relaxed person, so I let it go."

Jade, who also identifies as bisexual, shared her experience with the presumption of heterosexuality. "If I say 'my ex' in a conversation, they'd be like, 'Oh, he,' and automatically use male pronouns." In these situations Jade must constantly decide whether and how to come out as she explains, corrects or clarifies, "because at least just in my own personal experience, I always get that assumption." In situations where she does clarify, an equally inaccurate assumption takes its place. She explains that people assume that people are "just gay and lesbian. So, yeah, it's just a whole lot of erasure."

171

Chelsea's experience fell along these same lines:

> I almost think you encounter it the most with co-workers and people that you've had relationships with, but they're not friends. It's just like… my coworker… my boss, professors, TAs, classmates, people that you aren't close to, but people that know enough about you to start making assumptions. And people make assumptions anyways, but they start making these deeper assumptions. So I think that happens. I think microaggression really comes from that and since they're not really your friend, but they're not somebody that you don't know, it's really hard to be like, "Wait, listen. Did you just microaggress me?" It's hard to explain it because you don't know where you are with the person. So, I think that that's probably where I would say there's the most issues.

For Chelsea, the false presumption of familiarity in these relationships is compounded by her inability to correct or address misperceptions in a socially acceptable way. Spryte experiences something similar related to their use of gender neutral pronouns and identity as an asexual. As a small bodied person with somewhat feminine to androgynous features, Spryte is regularly subjected to the presumed use of feminine pronouns in most interactions. "I know people aren't doing it to be mean because this is a binary society" they acknowledge. "So they're just trying to identify me, so they just say 'she'." In these frequent situations, with strangers or others Spryte does not know well, they explained "I could correct you, but maybe I don't particularly want to bring that conversation up with you." The expectation that Spryte constantly address these slights and microaggressions to navigate the world in a way that is affirming and comfortable is like "rubbing a cat the wrong way" and further doesn't consider the degree to which doing so takes time and energy, or may compromise Spryte's safety and well-being.

Kenny explained his perspective, which differed from the experience of erasure and assumptions identified by his peers. "I think what sets me aside from the social justice people, is I think the intention matters a lot more than what is actually said," he

172

explained. "And when somebody asks me, 'Do you have a girlfriend?' I don't view that as them attacking me as a gay man. I view it more as, they just didn't know." For Kenny intention may override impact, and rather than feeling the assumption placed on him and his identity as restrictive, he responds with an assumption of good will. "They didn't intend it to hurt me, and I just politely correct them and let them know, 'No.'"

Skye's relationship with another trans-identified person becomes an object of assumption in challenging ways. "He passes more as male than I do, but a lot of times people look at me and because I predominantly pass as female here, people assume that I'm a lesbian," she explained, "and so there's a lot of times disbelief around our relationship or people wonder why a lesbian and a straight man would be together because sometimes that's how we're perceived."

Hector described "applying to be a babysitter with a lady, here in the [local community]" where his identity and expression was misread in a hurtful and insulting way. While Hector identifies and presents as a gay man, his disposition and expression is somewhat gender indeterminate. "She posted an announcement in the daily paper, which is the newsletter of the school, and I've done babysitting before" so was well qualified for the position. With short hair, soft androgynous features, and a higher soft-spoken vocal register, Hector's mannerisms stray toward the feminine, and his small stature does little to affirm his masculinity, but Hector was disturbed and frustrated to find out that this potential employer "thought I was a girl, actually. So that was just a little frustrating for me to realize that I'm so easily misunderstood which is something it can be very frustrating not to be understood."

Skye also described microaggressive stress associated with others' assumptions

about her gender, her body and her identity. She encounters these assumptions frequently, and finds that they disrupt her ability to be fully realized in other ways, including in her expertise and professionalism:

> Sometimes people have that expression, and so that's kind of disturbing because then I feel like I don't know how to have a conversation with that person because I know what they're thinking about is, 'Do you have a penis or a vagina?' And it's just minimizing you down to genitals. Even if they know that I'm trans, they don't understand non-binary issues. And so they assume that I'm female bodied regardless of how I identify. And so, as an example, one time I was in a meeting with a bunch of people and it was actually a safer sex discussion, and somebody said something about women or vaginas or something. Everybody looked at me like they're assuming that I have one and that I must be like an expert or something, right? And so that was really awkward because I don't… feel like I should have to want to explain my body or how I identify, but also I shouldn't have to like [pause] even if I have those parts, I'm not [pause] That doesn't make me an expert. Like lots of people have parts and know nothing about them. And so assumptions about bodies is something that stresses me out a lot.

Craig, too, felt reduced to his base sexual expression in a frustrating way when "stupid boys in bars," for instance, would affirm their heterosexuality and masculinity in response to his coming out. "you come out to them and they're like, 'Oh, that's fine, just don't hit on me,' or something like that." The offensive assumption is a hypersexualization of LGBTQ+ identity and the presumption that by virtue of their maleness and masculinity, they are somehow irresistible to same-sex sexual attraction or unable to master their hormones and desires. For both Skye and Craig, the assumptions are insulting and demeaning.

Other participants discussed the assumption of expertise around LGBTQ+ identity or experience posited by heterosexual peers or allies. Jade shared her experience on a panel of LGBTQ+ people sharing the diversity of their identities in a class. One of the reactions that is common is the propensity of well-intended participants to say something

174

like, "This is great, but I have a gay brother, so it wasn't beneficial to me." Jade explained that it's "very minimizing" and feels insulting to hear someone posit that the diversity of LGBTQ+ experience and identity "could be exemplified in this one experience of this one gay white man." Megan, too, has "just kind of bit my tongue and not said anything, or just kind of zoned out and not listened" in classrooms where there's "been the discussion of being gay and it's just like, to hear people that obviously haven't gone through it talk about it, is kind of hard, especially when they're not doing a good job explaining it." Both Megan and Jade want the opportunity to self-determine, to disclose and share their own experience in the time and manner that suits them, without being subject to assumptions or being conveniently compartmentalized and figured out through the lens of another's secondhand experience.

Yet even within and among LGBTQ+ communities, students reported experiences of erasure. Sam, who is slowly coming out in the LGBTQ+ as a transwoman, but has also been involved as a gay man, explained that "something I've seen a lot has been making assumptions about identities based on involvement in discussions about identities…. So, assuming that if you don't participate in a certain way, then you are not that identity." Students are invited into dialogues or excluded from dialogues based on how they are perceived to identify, and critical contributions may be missed or lost that might influence the individual in important ways, or take the conversation in unexpected or necessary directions to fully embody the best outcomes for inclusion of campus LGBTQ+s as a cohort or individuals on the continuum.

Microaggressions characterized by passive disengagement around issues of

LGBTQ+ oppression. "You can put on a Raider jacket, but that doesn't mean you're a Raider fan," explained Carlos (who identified as a fiercely loyal Raider fan) as he posited a metaphor relating back to those who use safe zone materials to indicate a support of the community that they don't actually embody in their lives. He continued, "so if people are reppin' LA shit, then you should not only be reppin' it, you should be promoting it, and you should be actively engaging in the conversation." But he doesn't see that active engagement by many of those who identify as allies, but rather people going through the motions and getting a certification that ultimately affirms something that they believe about themselves–that they are good and tolerant people. For Carlos, safe zone isn't about the self, it's about serving the other. Therefore he affirmed "I'm gonna say this. I'm gonna say, it's not about putting a sticker on your window; it's about the action that you take in having that sticker up there."

Sam recalled an incident on campus where hate speech graffiti was discovered. The response on campus to the incident that Sam perceived as significant was disappointing because "people are just little apathetic towards stuff they're not directly [pause] there was a campus discussion about it, but nobody went." Getting people to reach beyond their zones of comfort is very difficult, and makes creating conversations laborious. "I think everybody is like open to anybody's identity, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they're willing to do things about it or for it or with it" he shared in frustration. "There are very few events where you're getting new people coming," he explained, and Carlos lamented, "the only programs that I see that are supporting the community come from our Centers."

Skye agreed. "I actually think that here the faculty and stuff are more aware or more willing to learn or more willing to be vulnerable about what they don't know. Whereas students, it's just hard to get students involved in things," she explained. Her experience is around topics of oppression across the spectrum of marginalization, and perhaps a byproduct of cultural expectations around time and being busy. Students may also be reluctant to extend what they perceive as classroom learning beyond the course and syllabus expectations.

> It's really hard to get them interested in learning about something. Like, to a straight cis[gender] student why are LGBTQ issues relevant to them? That's a hard conversation to even get because people don't necessarily want to be involved in that. So that's the main thing, people tend to hold onto whatever their biases are just because they don't take the time to have the conversation.

Jade notes an apathy that belies genuine interest in reducing oppression through education as well. "Sometimes I feel that when it comes to our panel presentations, some of the professors utilize us and just throw us in there to be the section on the community." Instead of leveraging panelists' experience through a curricular lens, even well-intended faculty quickly move course conversation on to address other topics. "They won't necessarily really build upon [LGBTQ+ identity] within their syllabus, within the readings or anything like that," she explained. For Jade and Skye, these are missed opportunities to create communities of support and to reduce incidents of oppression through the educational enterprise.

The impact of microaggressions. As Center staff, Jordan listens to students frequently vent about their microaggressive experiences on campus. Conversations about LGBTQ+ identity, particularly those that include majority actors can be disruptive to students' sense of identity and self because while some discussions may be conceived as

177

intellectual, for LGBTQ+ students, the consequences of social conversation are real.

Jordan explains that:

> we're not just talking about for argument's sake. Your argument has consequences for my living and being… I think that's the piece that is demoralizing for students the most. Because I think you can expect people to make mistakes or coming from different places, and not everyone has had exposure to different cultures. Yes, but it's when the mistakes or the hurt occurs and then no one addresses it or explains it away… as, "Oh, we're just having an intellectual conversation here, we're not talking about bodies." It was like, "well, but you kinda are" because you can't abstract this theory or whatever from actual bodies and histories and stuff like that.

Lindsey sees this play out during the phenomena of group introductions that takes place frequently in many contexts across campus. She posited the example of the group with "one trans student or gender variant student…, and they have like pronouns that everyone else might not expect, and they're the only one who says their pronouns, it's super weird, and it automatically marks them as other." Lindsey sees and hears from her trans and non-binary friends about how they experience these interactions, particularly the gauntlet of them that occur in the early weeks of any academic semester. "They're present for that and they're being hurt because of that and I like [pause] I hate that, but I don't know a better way than other than to like normalize this process" except for "working with people to make visibility normal and easy and all that stuff" which is much easier said than done. Ultimately it leaves Lindsey feeling ineffective and relatively powerless.

Yet Karla sees potential in privilege, and the ways that privilege can be leveraged to create change individually and collectively:

> Many of us come to the work because we've been harmed. What about the pieces where you are privileged, and how to use that privilege for good as well? And that helps continue to recharge the conversation, if you will. So that when you've been

178

harmed, you know how to, sometimes, we patiently ask for redress and then when you do the harming, we also want some embrace as well and that's become a unique way to harness and bring all that together as well to the work.

Providing individuals with frameworks and roadmaps to help them become and overcome both their marginalization and their privilege are critical to reducing and addressing experiences of microaggressions, because Karla notes that people are rarely situated entirely in a space of social privilege or entirely in a space of social marginalization. Rather most of us must negotiate bounded and intersecting identities that reinforce our power and powerlessness.

Max describes a very real physically challenging experience that trans students encounter every day as they attempt to find restrooms that are safe and convenient. "That's just an everyday stressor for trans people, especially for not binary trans people to be like [pause] It's like 'Eenie, meenie, miney, moe, where am I supposed to go to the bathroom?'" G explained her experience making choices around bathroom use as a masculine presenting, female bodied person whose identity expression often invites confusion.

I use the men's restrooms sometimes, but I do not go in there most of the time, during high traffic hours or during the day. Most of the time, it's either in the evening, or in the night, or when I know that there's very little to no other people in there. It's just because I'm still having a hard time adjusting to it, just because I don't know I guess the guy code of how to be in the restroom. Obviously, I know that they don't talk and it's a very different environment, so I'm still trying to adjust to that.

Spryte always feels like they are on heightened alert, as well, but in a different way. They explained "I just keep thinking that somebody is gonna show up, or I'm gonna get like slurs written on my desk or the places where I go, or I'm gonna see something or hear something." Brett feels this stress too, describing it as "that pile on effect from

179

microaggressions and then I'm just looking for it more, more and more."

Shannon encounters people in her daily campus experience and her experience in classrooms that are "using sort of like this really inappropriate, and very rude, and very ignorant language [that] really hurts. And those are things I'm still processing on." Shannon feels pressure to respond, because she has had training and preparation to help develop bystander behavior. She understands intellectually the power of the teachable moment, and her ability to make a difference by showing disapproval or helping a peer understand why and how a microaggression is hurtful. But she finds that in the moment she is unable to overcome her panic and flight instinct. "It usually takes me like an hour. So it's like after the whole incident's done," she explained, she agonizes about "What could I have said?" She finds distress in the statements, and equally as damaging, finds disappointment in herself based on her inability to recover and respond in the ways she expects of herself.

Ale felt abandoned by a faculty member in a classroom when a peer made unsubstantiated comments about LGBTQ+ parenting and adoption. "The professor sort of was like, 'Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, blah blah blah,' and then sort of changed the subject really quick," Ale recalled. "She didn't really take a stand herself, which in a sense I understood because she's a professor, and maybe she wanted to stay in a neutral side." Yet the claims that were made were posited as factually grounded but Ale knew them to be factually incorrect, and leaving them unaddressed was a complicit endorsement. Upon further reflection, Ale concluded, "I feel that she should've spoken up, like she should've said something about how those are [equal and valid] rights. I don't know. I feel like she should've said something."

180

While Shannon and Ale are navigating social environments, Kent related navigating a physical neighborhood populated by Greeks and athletes to get from his housing location to campus. Traveling through this hyper-masculine area after dark or late at night is significantly stressful for Kent. "It's definitely a physical reaction, my palms get sweaty and my heart starts to race a little bit," he explained as he described how he responds when traveling alone in this area. "Sometimes I'll just take the long way home so I don't have to walk through that area. I'll go [by a less direct route], which is an extra quarter mile to half mile out of my way." It's inconvenient and emasculating, and Kent resists his gut feeling that this is an unsafe space for him, often just managing his anxiety if he's in a hurry. He admitted that "I could just cut through, but sometimes the lights aren't working or they're partying, and you get all these loud noises."

Skye has a similar experience making her way about the campus. "It's stressful in particular to me because of the violence I've experienced in the past, and so I'm always very nervous, like even whenever it doesn't go that direction." For some students the stress of navigating the institution as an LGBTQ+ person is just too great. Jade explained that in her role working in a Center, "we have noticed students step away and either not even be a part of the institution anymore. They just drop out."

Coping with microaggressions. Choosing not to recognize or respond to microaggressions is a response in itself that some students make. Chelsea related that "somebody wrote 'fag' on my white board thing, I wasn't bothered by it. I was like, 'Really? That's ridiculous.' But I understand that other people would be, some other people could be. So, for me, I brush things off." Describing a situation where he and a friend were called "fags" by the occupants of a passing car, Craig similarly shrugged off

the experience as he diminished, "I can understand that people aren't always gonna be as comfortable with themselves like I'm comfortable with myself, so I try not to take it to heart." Another minimizing strategy that Craig employed was a comparative consideration of his experience. "I've never been beat up, or had a drink thrown on me, or just anything like that. It's actually a pretty nice place to be," he commented. Yet his casual characterization of an environment as "pretty nice" based on a lack of identity-based violence or physical aggression speaks to just how bad a situation would have to be for Craig to read it as truly distressing. Landon's comments were in a similar vein. "I've had stuff thrown at me as I've walked down the street… I've had people just like yell, slurs at me as I walk down the street… But I haven't been a recipient of physical violence or things like that."

Lindsey, on the other hand, admitted, "I don't know, I sort of have a very fantastic view of [this institution] and try to not think to much about the bad things that happen, although, I know that's kind of a deluded way to live." Carefully protecting an established worldview is a strong motivation to disregard one's own experiences of disenfranchisement. Veronica acknowledged experiences of having "been misgendered several times. And I know that is definitely a big thing for other people." But she declines to let these experiences get to her. "I'm a pretty relaxed person, so I let it go, not to mention I'm confused and I understand why they would misgender me, so I'm pretty relaxed about it."

Veronica is both making excuses for the microaggression behavior of others, and also taking partial responsibility, justifying the experience because she is still developing and exploring her gender identity and expression. Yet she contends that "it does

182

technically count as microaggression, because it could build up. But so far I've just been 'whatever' about it." Veronica's projection of responsibility from perpetrators of microaggression to herself may ultimately be self-defeating and counterproductive, yet it is a not uncommon way for students to manage and cope with microaggressions. Kent has a variant take with similar overtones to Veronica's acceptance of partial responsibility. "Other people have wronged me but I've wronged other people too," stated Kent, "so it's more like a putting perspective on everything and realizing there's different perspectives." Kent's stance that everyone makes mistakes is a way of assuming some culpability for his own microaggressions in a way that also diminishes the culpability that others have for theirs. It almost posits a universality where everyone gets back a little of what they give, except that hegemonic systems assure that the marginalized are the expressed targets of microaggression, but also socialized to be complicit as they perpetuate the systems that oppress them.

Owning that "I would say humor is a coping mechanism," Kent buffered the impact of microaggressions in a different way, as well. "I find it hilarious. I've just learned to laugh about it. Because if you can't laugh at yourself and you can't laugh at the stupid crap that happens to you, then you're just gonna be miserable all the time," he shared. As a transman, restrictive housing policies require him to live in a sex-designated residence hall, making him the only man in a hall of otherwise all women. This leads to awkward bathroom encounters, but Kent brushes these off, too. "Depending on the other individual. I personally don't care. You wanna leave the bathroom while I'm in here? More privacy for me. Go right on ahead."

Char shared that she has only recently begun to cultivate a growing recognition

"that my experience is valid and that sometimes it's gonna suck. I don't know. In my life it has been easy to write off my own feelings and like 'Oh, well, maybe it wasn't actually that bad,' or whatever." Denying experiences or diminishing the pain that they inflict, as evidenced by Veronica and Char, can allow students to re-focus their efforts away from identity and identity work to accomplish other goals or attend to other aspects of life that are more manageable. Yet delusion or avoidance may not ultimately be successful strategies in the long term, and individuals may need to develop additional or alternate coping strategies as they move forward or the collective pain of microaggression encounters builds. For Char, encounters she had imagined as individual and entirely singular began to take shape as a collective. "You start to see patterns, like it's not just me, it's not just this one person said this one thing to me," she explained. "It's a bigger system. And I think that that is something that came through."

No longer interested in internalizing microaggressions or writing them off as unfortunate singular experiences, Char found a similar social circle of "maybe seven queer people, almost all, like, either, woman-identified or trans-identified, and we just were able to connect and to talk about the shitty stuff that had happened that week, and comfort each other and support each other." The group served as a counterspace, and would meet with regularity, but the conversation was informal, encompassing "everything ranging from like a professor making a comment in class that was problematic or fears about going home after this first year," she explained. The community that she created through this process and the friendships that followed "were the most emotionally rewarding in terms of being a queer person at [my institution]" and served as a buffer to the daily indignities served up by microaggressions. Char also

184

restricts her interactions to avoid encounters framed by ignorance. "I'm very intentional about who I spend time with and who I [pause] yeah, who I'm around, that I just really avoid people who give me bad vibes."

Hector takes the opposite approach. "I'm usually the one who likes to make a comment that could spark some thought among people," he explained with a mischievous grin, "because then discussions can rise and conversations about these issues that sometimes go unnoticed or ignored." Hector noted that his experience of addressing identity transgressions on campus was easier than doing the same thing during his study abroad experience to France, where he felt on less firm footing culturally and socially. "I like being in the element of discomfort, in certain spaces, not everywhere, right?" To address or avoid a microaggression response is an individual decision based on context, comfort and one's own need to respond or act in that moment to that microaggression.

Kent reported generally good experiences confronting microaggressions. Describing a classroom situation where he felt microaggressed by a faculty member, he recalled that "as soon as I spoke up and said something to the individual, they were like, 'Oh, I didn't even think about it. I just. It's never been an issue in any of my classes.'" The faculty member followed up by making adjustments to adjust "that particular lecture to be a little different. So I mean if you just step up and say something. Usually people just don't think about it."

Chelsea acknowledged that she has grown in her ability and willingness to confront microaggressions. Asked to wear a polo shirt as part of her work uniform, she asked for the men's cut for comfort, but her supervisor declined, providing her with the more form fitting women's cut instead. "I didn't want to wear the girl Polo. It was too

185

tight and it was short," but she acquiesced and didn't argue. Since that time, her attitude

has changed dramatically. "Now it would be like, 'Give me the boy Polo. Don't make me

call HR. [chuckle] I do not wanna have this conversation with you.' But then I was like,

'Okay', and I just took it."

Mary noted that in counterspace, such as the company of peers who share an

identity affinity, the discussion often turns to shared experiences of oppression and ways

that students make meaning of and respond to them:

> We talk a lot about dealing with our families, the difference between being at
> home and being here and stuff like that. And other things, too, but that, I think, is
> the thing where most people have expressed stress and me as well. So having that
> space where talking about [and] very intentionally discussing our problems and
> how others have coped with it and things like that, has been really, really useful.

This practice of developing or strategizing responses to microaggressions was a

common theme among respondents. Referring to her social group, Veronica shared that

"they all have their own coping strategies, like [C] breathes. So sometimes it's just nice to

just sit there and just take a breath" And Brett explained that "we're working with

students all the time in various places of understanding, so helping them understand what

better ways there are to say certain things or how to react to negative experiences" was a

goal of Center staff on his campus. "I think helping them navigate that is something

really important that we have to work on."

Brett went on to point out that just as students encountered microaggressions from

peers outside the LGBTQ+ community, even members of the community and allies

crossed lines and made mistakes in the way that differences were addressed within the

space of the Center. These in-community microaggressions afforded students with

opportunities to check each other in relative safety. Speaking of these interactions in the

Center, Brett said:

> It's also a good place for students to practice dealing with microaggressions, because we make it very clear that you're allowed to address things respectfully, with people. Whereas, if students have never done that before and they're interacting with the service provider on campus and that service provider says something, they may not know how to respond other than just take it and move on, and let it pile on. So I feel like the Center educates people how to deal effectively with microaggressions.

Tara related that another way that Center staff help students to cope with microaggressions is by making reporting mechanism visible. "A professor had said something," she shared. "It didn't feel right, the way he said it, and I was talking to [Center staff] about it and he was like, 'You can report that. And that's how we get things stopped at this campus.'"

Students cope with microaggressions in a variety of ways, including by avoiding, diminishing or laughing them off. Microaggressions can also be confronted directly, processed through venting and sharing with peers in community, or through official campus reporting structures that allow students to report incidents of bias. Centers serve the invaluable role of providing space for students to share, develop and cultivate skills that help them cope with microaggressions, and to gain resilience strategies that will serve them as they make and accomplish goals and objectives on campus and beyond campus.

Counterspaces

Most physical spaces on campus reflect heteronormative cultural norms and expectations, leaving students with underrepresented sexual orientations and gender identities constantly guarding against microaggressions, emotional abuse and the threat or experience of violence (Vaccaro, 2012). The added stress of navigating these hostile

187

campus environments is considerably draining for LGBTQ+ people. Students therefore often seek and create counterspaces, free of the hostility and identity resistance endemic to other spaces.

As such, counterspaces serve as gathering places for people at the margins who often come together for mutual comfort and support. Members engage in sharing of common experiences and in validating one another's experience of oppression. This can serve to buffer the impact of microaggressions, and foster the development of individual and collective strategies that bolster resistance and resilience. Ultimately these counterspaces, constituted as formal or informal associations—for instance, class- or major-related groups, student organizations or institutional structures such as culture centers or ethnic studies curricula—serve as "an important strategy for minority students' academic survival" (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 71) and institutional persistence (Case & Hunter, 2012; Grier-Reed, 2010; Huber & Cueva, 2012; Nunez, 2011; Revilla, 2010; Schwartz, 2014; Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

Participants shared many campus people and places where they felt accepted and free to express themselves authentically. Students experienced affirmation and opportunities for identity exploration through their choice of majors and interactions with faculty as described by Tara, Sam, Megan and G. Landon and Felicia, among others, reported supportive peers and friend networks. And many participants described support from student affairs offices or university functional areas such as Max's experience with the Dean of Students Office, Faith and Kent's interactions with health and counseling services, Carlos's work in a campus identity center, or Spryte and Kenny's experience with residential life.

In addition to the examples of counterspaces already discussed, attention must be given to the role that LGBT Clubs play in creating counterspace for students, as well as the identity politics that get played out in these groups, and then conversation will reflect the positive experiences of being LGBTQ+ on campus as related by participants.

The role and value of LGBT clubs. Students find critical counterspace and supportive community in their engagement through LGBT clubs and student organizations on campus. Craig quickly connected with the LGBT group on his campus. "I started to get involved and going to those weekly meetings and the parties and just different functions and events that they would have. Eventually I ended up holding a position on the board. I was Activism chair." Chelsea explained that that she "struggled a lot in my freshman year. I wanted to go home, I didn't want to be here." She had some anxiety that if she went to a LGBT club meeting, "everybody will think I'm gay. Whatever, I kind of am," she recalls thinking. "Everybody was so welcoming, and it just was one of those moments where I really felt a connection there" and this connection enabled her to identify peers with whom she could develop friendships, community and influenced her decision to persist.

Tara rushed a sorority that caters to women who are straight, lesbian, bisexual or fluid. She explained that "I really wanted that bond and sisterhood thing. So to get that but with people who understand like the struggle with sexuality and the way you present sometimes, and it's just really cool." Spryte helped found a club that explored sexual orientation and gender identity through a professional lens. It is with and among the members of this group that they feel most accepted. "If I'm with somebody from [this group], I feel like I don't have to continue acting because I [pause] two man army, I

189

guess" they said with a chuckle. Kent explained that he "helped found an organization for queer athletes last year." Megan related that her experience with other lesbian and bisexual women through the women's rugby team was a supportive organizational space for her.

Trevor works in the Center, and noted that "many of the people at the [LGBT club] meetings this semester are also our regulars, kind of, some of our regular students who are hanging out here on our couches, and on Monday afternoons." Students find their way to these student groups through Center referral, but they also find their way to the Center through organizational involvement. The relationship is natural and necessary, and mutually beneficial.

Student groups serve multiple purposes, however, and are situated differently than Centers in important ways for students, as noted by Sam who explained that much conversation had taken place about the purpose of the main campus LGBT-serving organization, as to "whether or not it's a place to advocate, or discussing issues, or discussing national issues or local issues that are happening, or a place to be close friends with other queer people." He noted that different students have different needs, and development trajectories help to determine the kinds of outcomes students want from their involvement in groups. "I think that's a tension that has been coming to a head very recently" in his own group and he explained that "I fall more on the, using it as a space for discussion side, and I think a lot of people are more on the, it's a place to make very close friends and be happy with each other all the time."

Hector expressed that "I found that there are a lot of groups where I can be safe in sharing my sexual identity" from a small identity-based cohort to the campus wide LGBT

190

Club. For Hector, the prior was "a place where I just found my voice and ability to speak about my experience as an individual of Color, who also identifies as gay." As he described the latter, he shared that "at some point I realized that it was mostly a space for white people, but who identify as LGBTQ" which was alienating because Hector didn't want to experience a compartmentalized involvement. "So that was at first annoying because I felt that… there was not enough representation of other identities and most of the discussions and everything was led by students who were not of Color."

Jordan sees these tension around purpose and representation in the groups on his campus, "there's the whole other thing of, is it a social thing or is it an educational activist-y thing," he explained. But he also describes the tensions that exist around whether the group and its leaders reflect an intersectional understanding of LGBTQ+ identity and experience. "The cultures are generally white and cisgender every year. And so there are some tensions over like exactly who is [the group] for?" This is true for Char, who lamented that "there's not too many queer People of Color spaces, or at least not many queer People of Color out of people I've met" on campus.

Other students expressed a desire for spaces that are solely queer-identified. Lindsey was reluctant to continue her involvement with the umbrella LGBT group on her campus after some time, in part because "anyone can go, even allies. And I'm less into the whole ally thing. At least in intentional queer spaces, I think that there's a time and place for allies, and I don't think that intentional queer space is necessarily that." Lindsey's identity interest became focused and immersed on queer issues and queer identity, and the broader association facilitated through the LGBT club wasn't meaningful. Rather, her association and later leadership of a group of queer women has

191

been transformational. "I think finding the community has been amazing, and I think being a part of making that community possible has been really empowering."

Mary shared a similar experience. "It was really when I started going to the queer orgs that I started to feel more comfortable with everything. I went to [the umbrella LGBT club] first, which I don't really go to anymore." The group came to feel constraining because "it's very centered around activism and not so much about actual identities. And the way it's ran, I think it kinda focuses on certain identities of the queer space rather than everybody. So, it can be a little frustrating." Like Lindsey, as her awareness of the diversity of LGBTQ+ identity has expanded, her needs for organizational support have evolved. She describes her involvement in a small discussion group of students who share facets of her identity in a small group context as she explains that "I just feel more comfortable there and I feel like, where it's talking about things that I really want to talk about."

Char went to one of the LGBT clubs on campus early on but found that she "didn't like it very much. It was really big. Seemed dominated by a lot of really loud, extroverted gay men, which is like fine, and also not like the people that I generally gel well with." She kept exploring and settled on a Friday afternoon discussion group comprised of "maybe seven queer people, almost all, like, either, woman-identified or trans-identified, and we just were able to connect and to talk about the shitty stuff that had happened that week, and comfort each other and support each other."

The diversity of LGBTQ+ identities represented by students demands multiple modes of interaction and support, and the existence of groups that target the needs and desired outcomes that inspire student involvement are important. They are structurally

192

important in that they facilitate student persistence and success, but they have cultural relevance, as well, because they provide evidence, by their existence, that numbers of LGBTQ+ students are able to support engagement in multiple clubs and organizations, but that also that community needs extend beyond mere solidarity as might be represented by the exclusive presence of a single social and advocacy organization coalescing around all LGBTQ+ identities collectively.

Positive experiences. Participants also reported a number of experiences on campus that were welcoming, inviting and identity affirming. In a general discussion of campus obstacles and barriers that marginalize people based on sexual orientation and gender identity, it is valuable and important to acknowledge that every space and every experience is not an obstacle. While LGBTQ+ identity does add an element of challenge to students' daily navigation of campus, there are also many ways that students find value, meaning and self efficacy through an identity lens.

One of Hector's first experiences on campus, within his orientation group, sent a signal of acceptance when individuals were prompted to share their preferred pronouns during introductions. "Everyone was very supportive and I ended up accepting that kind of ritual and that is very common in every, every time there's like moments or spaces where people are meant to meet each other."

Lindsey's experience of leading an LGBT club has developed her in meaningful ways. "I think being able to be a part of that community but also being able to facilitate that community, it had been a really important wonderful experience." Spryte was so proud of a recent program sponsored by a LGBT club where they hold the presidency. "We had a bunch of people come out from all over the state to come and hold that candle

light vigil" for Trans Day of Remembrance. Despite arctic cold and a long program, people stayed and people honored those lost through identity-related violence. For Spryte is was a success, but a powerful testament to their own value.

Max reported meeting people on campus who shared his LGBTQ+ identity, or who provided assistance. A first year faculty member "is queer and like, she talks about her wife and their kids and stuff" and Max's leadership development activities with the Dean of Students resulted in further contact when Max began to transition genders on campus. Both relationships have been supportive and affirming and continue to reinforce that Max is in the right place and belongs there. Skye received preferential treatment in receipt of campus ID that reflected her preferred name. "when I originally got here, a staff person on purpose put my preferred name on my [campus] ID" At the time, Skye didn't make much notice about it, but after seeing others who struggle to accomplish the same thing the gesture is retroactively meaningful. "It's not supposed to happen that way, so I don't really know how that happened," she explained.

Brett shared that "healthcare on campus is the best I've ever received, hands down anywhere. Not just on campuses. They're very, very inclusive." Chelsea found an instant community when she started coming to the LGBT Center. "Everybody was so welcoming, and it just was one of those moments where I really felt a connection there."

The positive experiences related here are not the only positive experiences shared by participants, but represent the sorts of experiences that characterize their inclusion and participation on campus in meaningful ways. It is these sorts of opportunities and gestures that convey warmth and belonging and allow students sometimes the courage and strength to continue to struggle against the barriers and obstacles that seek too often

194

to exclude them.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES OF LGBT RESOURCE CENTERS

LGBT Centers serve multiple simultaneous and congruent purposes on campus, serving the needs of all students, faculty and staff by working to create spaces where LGBTQ+ people are fully included in the educational enterprise. Yet the specific and valuable contributions that Centers make have not been fully articulated. This chapter draws on the experiences of participants to describe the valuable ways that Centers contribute to the campus through their activities and practices. These activities and practices are described by nine themes that emerged from open coding of the data. Open coding, a process described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) of carefully parsing and disaggregating the data such that similarities and differences across interview transcripts might be drawn out, was used to determine critical connections and meanings through the linkages of common experience, and similar participant understanding. The nine themes that emerged from this process of open coding described activities and practices common to the LGBT Centers under observation: Advocacy; ally development; fostering visibility; assessment; developing LGBTQ+ community and counterspace; specialized expertise; advising; leadership development; and providing information, referral and resources. Each of these Center activities and practices are described and explored more fully in the pages that follow.

Advocacy

The first Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that of advocacy, and three sub-themes became evident: Articulating the value of LGBTQ+ inclusion; breaking down institutional systems of oppression; and mission alignment. The following will consider the theme broadly and then differentiate and discuss each sub-theme. The very existence of Centers is grounded in an inclusion and social change movement, and so activities that advocate for greater social justice, and for the needs of the LGBTQ+ students served individually and collectively by them are fundamental to their existence. Jade, employed as an educator and programmer within a Center, observed that "I've noticed a lot of trans students or gender nonconforming students who are lacking that support in those systems within the University, whether it be peers or administrators or whoever." This lack of support, or even overt identity resistance, is evident in "the day-to-day things that people deal with. For example, having to tell your professor your pronouns, or tell them that the name that's on their roster isn't the name that you go by. It's not your name." Without strong allies and vocal advocates, she explains that "students step away and are not even a part of the institution anymore. They just drop out." A student may be able to persist when bolstered by solidarity with others in ways that feel impossible when students feel as if they are left facing overwhelming obstacles alone. Centers provide both direct advocacy on behalf of individuals, and they also provide skill development to help individuals gain the capacity to advocate for themselves.

As advocates for students who are unable to navigate institutional structures on their own, Center staff become trusted allies and stalwarts of support. Skye shares their

experience that when they confront an obstacle on campus they have a confidence that they "can go [to the Center] and talk to [the Director] and figure out a plan of action for resolving things. And almost always, it gets resolved very quickly. And so, that's been really nice, not to feel like I'm my only advocate."

There is also an institutional credibility that Center staff can leverage which might elude students as self-advocates. Kenny describes a course assignment that peculiarly required students to apply make-up and then have that application critiqued by others who shared the student's same gender. This was an understanding of gender identity grounded in the binary and enforced through the faculty-to-student power dynamic. After Kenny challenged the requirement and felt generally rebuffed by the faculty member, Kenny turned to Center staff who "backed me up on that, told me that is not appropriate. She can not require that of us, just because [the college's] policy does protect us from gender discrimination."

A second approach by Center staff to the faculty member was successful in gaining reluctant resolution for the student. After several such experiences, Kenny feels very comfortable that he can go to Center staff who "will meet with me and discuss almost anything. If there's an issue that I have, he has the answer or he will contact somebody for me right then and there to correct it." This passionate advocacy on behalf of students communicates an ethic of care and conveys an urgency that students' needs are important and timely. Kenny observes that his Center contact is "not the type of person that will say, 'Oh, I'll get back to you.' It's always, then, there, the problem is corrected. So I have always been really appreciative about him."

Center staff members help provide a foundation of skills and support that allows

students to advocate on their own behalf, as well. Veronica describes a project to expand gender inclusive bathroom availability on campus: "my first year we didn't have that many, but some students got together, and proposed this idea [for addition additional bathrooms]." A short period of strategizing and planning followed, as "they worked with the [Center] to actually get the logistical aspects of it. And now we actually have gender neutral restrooms in almost all the buildings." Veronica beams with pride as she speaks to her involvement in having helped to create this change that she felt so strongly about. "You can definitely see how the [Center] works as a support, rather than the active, 'Oh, I'm doing this for you.' It's more like if the students want something, they go to the [Center], and the [Center] helps them." When students are empowered to advocate on their own behalf, the process is both substantive in that it creates results that students want to see, but it is also developmental in that it grows a critical skill set that will serve them in multiple capacities during their time at the institution and as engaged citizens after. Veronica sums up the experience of making change and developing this valuable skill set, saying with a humble smile, "So that's really nice."

Aiden acknowledges his own gains in skills and capacity: "I had great experiences, obviously, at the LGBTQ Center. Not only as someone who uses its services, but as a way for the Center to help develop me." The Center and it's staff have now become a resource, a tool and a partner in Aiden's own advocacy agenda. "I can go to [the Director] and say, 'Hey, I want to work on this issue on campus.' And he's not saying, 'No, we can't do that. It's too far away, or it's too big.'" Instead Aiden finds support and a Director who is asking ""Okay, what do you need, and how can I help you?"

One of the ways that Aiden has worked to change his campus is through expanded

resources in the area of student health and health services. This has created opportunities

for a blending of both Center advocacy roles–direct advocacy and empowerment of

students to self-advocate. Aiden explains that "having access to hormone replacement

therapy, having access to surgical benefits is important as a trans person. So, they've

empowered me to advocate for that on my own behalf, but also advocate on my behalf."

But further, "every meeting I go to with HR or anyone else, [Center staff is] there to back

me up and say, 'I'm a Director of the LGBTQ Center. This is important for LGBTQ

students.'" As a research area, Aiden has focused on building the capacity of health care

providers around trans identity and care practices. He had a desire to use that growing

expertise in assisting the professional development of campus health care providers.

> I feel like it's important. I feel like at [my institution], there's a huge gap between
> students and staff in a lot of ways. So, if I walked into the Health Center by
> myself and I said, "This is my research and this is what I want. I want to do a
> training for you." I might not get my foot in the door. But having [Center staff]
> there to say, "No. I work with Aiden. We work a lot on the same issues. He would
> like to come do a training for you." Or, "I can vouch for Aiden. He's very good at
> doing trainings." I think that's also an important way. So, not only advocating for
> me to get services, but also advocating for me for professional development
> reasons. I think those are both really important things, as well.

Advocacy takes on additional forms beyond those Centers practice in direct

advocacy on behalf of students and in empowering and teaching them to self-advocate.

Each campus has its own evolving campus and LGBTQ+ community cultures that dictate

the priorities and ways in which this advocacy takes place, however advocacy activities

grouped into four advocacy sub-themes: articulating the value of LGBTQ+ inclusion

across the institution and its purposes; breaking down institutional systems of oppression;

and ensuring alignment between the institution's expressed and lived mission and its

activities.

Articulating the Value of LGBTQ+ Inclusion

A primary advocacy activity of Centers is to consistently voice the institutional

value of broad inclusion of students, faculty, staff and others who fall within the

LGBTQ+ identity continuum. Keeping this value conversation central to the institution is

a relatively complex prospect, because different constituencies may have nuanced

understandings of the community, varying attention spans, and further because advocacy

efforts may need to be specially framed to converge with the interests and evolving

capacity of each of these institutional audiences.

Institutional leaders and stakeholders. Institutional boards or other leaders may

hear from within the institution calls of constituents and advocates for greater inclusion

of or supports for LGBTQ+ members. Yet those proposed inclusion initiatives compete

for a limited pool of resources alongside other institutional priorities, calls to action and

legal compliance requirements. Sheryl, who oversees culture center activities on her

campus, shared that for a number of years, students, faculty and staff had been

advocating for a Center presence, had conducted needs studies and published several

compelling reports, but were seeing no progress towards expanded services to LGBTQ+

students. The politics of moving forward were challenging given the institutional fiscal

environment and the city and state political climate.

Conversations about the educational value of diverse interactions, or differences

in institutional educational outcomes, for example, around persistence and institutional

obstacles for LGBTQ+ students, were not enough to secure resources. The administrator

recalls that "what saved the day was when we had our accreditation," and the

administrator's strategic decision to leverage the visit in particular ways to share the institution's needs and potentials through the accreditation process, such that "when they came in to do the accreditation report, the campus got dinged for several things around diversity and inclusion. And the lack of support for the LGBT community was a big one." Having the need for greater services to LGBTQ+ students reinforced by an external group, especially one with a voice as powerful as an institutional accreditor, allowed the administrator to leverage greater support and quickly establish a Center.

Further, the existence of the Center, and the positive outcomes that are flowing from it are self-referential. The supports and services that the Center provides on campus reinforce its value, and create a strong narrative for an ever-greater presence. "I think that's it's really important for them to grow and expand, because not only are they serving LGBT students, but they're serving the university and they're making the university a safer place." Guiding the conversation towards the value that LGBTQ+ inclusion contributes to major university needs, like the safety of students and accreditation processes is a compelling, strategic and purposeful frame for high level institutional leaders.

Faculty and Academic Affairs administrators. The message communicated to faculty and academic affairs administrators about the value of LGBTQ+ inclusion may take a different focus—for example, highlighting the ways that the instructional goals of the institution are best served in the context of difference. Jordan frames a critical question he poses to this constituency saying, "if we're trying to set ourselves apart as this world premier educational institution, isn't this the whole point of having this diversity here so that people can critically engage with perspectives and experiences different than

202

their own?" He goes on to tie this idea into developmental outcomes that exceed the specific classroom application, adding that an overarching instructional goal is often to create a learning context where students "can personally learn and grow how to live in a pluralistic environment." He explains that faculty members often "get that first part. But that second part, the learning, growing and how to live in a pluralistic environment, I think is underplayed or not seen at all."

He uses this conversational bridge to create visibility and purpose, and to break down a common division between academic affairs and student affairs work. "I think that's part of why the whole person has shifted to student affairs [as a] nice, extra thing and not the real work of the college as it were." He later explains that shifting faculty mindsets to recognize the value of inclusion and attending to the fully-realized, authentic, lived experiences of students in the context of a learning environment is fundamental to meaningful education. These conversations are engaged through a variety of interactions and faculty development contexts, such as workshops and brown bag lunches, through partnerships with campus centers that promote excellence in teaching and learning, and formal and informal conversations with faculty, faculty leaders, and academic affairs administrators.

Prospective students and families. An additional area of advocacy often extends to the ways the institution messages LGBTQ+ inclusion to prospective and incoming students and their families. This conversation challenges admissions and enrollment management areas to see both the opportunities that exist through actively promoting LGBTQ+ communities on campus, but also the risks endemic to keeping these conversations at the margins. This means actively reaching out and educating external

203

audiences and institutional actors, which obviously includes admissions counselors but may also include, for instance, alumni who serve the process in a variety of capacities, about the current campus climate for LGBTQs and efforts to grow and develop inclusion to an ever greater degree.

Felicia recalled her college search, and seeking out contacts and perspectives from institutional representatives that could fill in gaps about the LGBTQ+ community on the campuses she was considering. "Every single time I visited a college," she explains, "Or I went there as an alumni thing, I would try to drag them off and be like, 'Hey, can you tell me about what it's like with LGBTQ stuff? What's the environment like?'" She found very little awareness about the LGBTQ+ community from these institutional representatives from her current institution, but the financial aid she was offered was irresistible. The Center was founded and really began to make progress on campus about the same time as she arrived. After several years of contributing to that process, Felicia is now actively enthusiastic, sharing, "I was happy that I came to [my institution], because there's so much support because of the Center and because of everything that's going on." She would advocate that institutions actively promote the LGBTQ+ presence and Center supports to incoming and interested students: "I would just be like, 'No, we have a Center and it's really, really nice, and it's really supportive.'"

Peers and the campus community. Another way that Centers coordinate outreach and inclusion is through speakers bureaus or paneling activities. Upon request, LGBTQ+ students who have been trained to share their coming out stories and provide education to peers and the campus community are called upon to share identity experiences in classes and other campus programming. Eric describes these educators as

204

"a volunteer corps of students, faculty and staff members who share aspects of their lives and their experiences through the power of narrative autobiography, to help inform about different experiences across diverse communities." On some campuses, these educational panels, and the outreach and exposure that they facilitate, are taking place in multiple classrooms on a weekly basis. They serve to demystify the experiences of LGBTQ+ people, to give basic information, and to provide an opportunity for peers to ask questions and satisfy their curiosity.

Ale, a panel volunteer, explained how she has "talked to people in a lot of my different classes, who are not part of the community, but they talk about how much they've benefited from, and how interested they were in the panels." She smiles as she reflects on the difference she's able to make. She continued, "I think that's really cool because I think that's the main way that the [Center] is working towards raising awareness, because other people are not going to become aware if they're not educated." As Ale implies, the outcome of these conversations is that LGBTQ+ peers are no longer abstracted caricatures constructed on assumptions and media portrayals, and become understood to be very similar in goals and aspirations to the students for whom they are presenting.

Articulating a related purpose of the panels, Landon observes his own growth through the experience of being a panelist. "I've become more confident about just coming out to people, and things like that. So I think it's increased my resilience if anything." Likewise, Faith explains that her involvement with the panels has provided her with "really good experiences, really positive experiences, not only because I felt like we were helping to help people be more informed, but also just to have the opportunity to be

out and representing myself and people like me." In both of these cases, panel service allowed students to do good in their community, and contribute to a more positive campus climate, but also to bolster their identity efficacy and personal confidence.

The panels also serve an additional purpose—to create safer space for LGBTQ+ students in several ways. Panel educated peers are probably more likely to be more accepting of LGBTQ+ peers, but they also will have learned aspects of courtesy and respect that previously eluded them, or to which they previously gave little thought. This lack of knowledge manifests in microaggressions that LGBTQ+ students experience on a frequent and recurring basis, and that create negative self-perceptions and challenging campus climates. Helping other students to be aware of and reduce these incidents is a part of the value of education. "A lot of people don't know how to address LGBTQ people, 'What can I say? What can I not say?' I feel like that's what we've been addressing mostly," explains Brett, "It's not necessarily negative attitudes towards, but just how to help people improve their interactions." There is power in making the invisible visible, both in the existence, lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ people, but also in the ways that unintentional, unnecessary slights can result in significant emotional consequences. Kent, a trans student who presents as a self-described "good old country boy" in his flannel shirt, cap and jeans talks about his experience of paneling in a class of similar appearing guys within the Agriculture Department: "I'm still a person, I still have preferences and dislikes. I just happen to be a person that doesn't fit what your expectation is. It's like, to me, doing stuff like this, speaking on panels, that's what's really going to push the campus climate to a safer area."

LGBTQ+ people and allies. Finally, Centers serve to center the margins of the LGBTQ+ community itself along with community allies. Spryte, who identifies as asexual, shared "I've had students talk about feeling marginalized, just by virtue of being in the plus, and not really feeling like that's included and not really knowing sort of, what to do about that." They went on to explain, "because if you're not in one of the four [LGBT archetypes], you're erased but not on purpose. It's just that…" they pause and consider before continuing, "they were the first four that got our attention. Yeah, those are the first four. And sometimes T isn't included. Or sometimes B isn't included." It is a frustration and a puzzle, and Spryte doesn't know quite where to go with it.

Yet the work of Centers has always involved expanding inclusion toward more marginalized sexual and gender identities. Originally attentive to the needs of gay males and lesbians only, Centers have grown to include and address the needs of bisexuals and the transgender community, and to identities with a growing significance and presence on and beyond the campus. In more recent years, this has included education and articulating the value of inclusion around asexuals and asexuality, people who identity as non-binary, and those whose identify as fluid and/or multi-sexual or multi-romantic, to name a few. Brett identified this is an important activity of his Center, saying "I feel like the Center is setting a very good model for those students and those organizations who are LGBT identified to be inclusive. And also, showing them example of what inclusivity can look like."

Further, Centers have turned attention to intersectionality, and the ways in which multiple social identity constructs, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, race, faith, national origin, socio-economic status, to name a few, converge in the experiences

of individuals to create unique self-understandings and ways of knowing and being.

Jordan points out that in this sort of educational process, "always there's risk involved and you get to be vulnerable. So getting students to really engage across difference can sometimes be difficult." Just as it's challenging to ask majority students to break down long-held beliefs and conceptions about the world, such is true, too, for LGBTQ+ people across sub-communities, and at intersections that expose unintentional biases, such as racism, classism or others. Toes get stepped on and feelings get hurt through these conversations and interactions, and students need to be challenged and supported as self-advocates and social actors with responsibility for their privilege. But the outcomes of these educational journeys can be just as powerful. Char shares her experience:

> I think one of the things that I love about the [the Center] is it focuses on not just one particular set of identities. I think that there's a lot of beauty in not just focusing on LGBT students as a group, and not just focusing on Students of Color as a group. Or I shouldn't say LGBT students, but queer issues or racism. Because, obviously, white students are implicated into some sort of racism. But that the [Center] does a really good job of saying this isn't a one-or-the-other issue. We're focusing... We have resources for queer students, we have resources for Students of Color, we have resources for white students committed to racial justice and straight students committed to LGBTQ issues.

The value of this sort of critical work, and the cultivation of intersectional lenses within students served by Centers is invaluable, something Sam reinforced when he shared that "I think that [Center activities] do a really good job centering queerness within other identities, and I think that's something that has been really positive."

Breaking Down Institutional Systems of Oppression

Centers also serve as critical forces to break down existing hegemonic structures that enforce LGBTQ+ oppression or which create barriers to inclusion and persistence of

208

LGBTQ+ students. Because institutions were founded and have long histories grounded in cultural models that exclude recognition of LGBTQ+ identity, there are systemic patterns of exclusion and disenfranchisement grounded in institutional assumptions and heteronormative culture. When encountered by LGBTQ+ people, these structures serve to police and enforce heteronormativity (Dilley, 2002). In isolation, LGBTQ+ people may feel invalidated and exhausted by patterns which resist them individually.

Centers help individuals to understand their responses to exclusion as valid, and also to identify structures that systematically deny equity to LGBTQ+ people. On reflecting about her own growth through Center involvement, Char shared that a skill she had learned was "recognizing that my experience is valid and that sometimes it's gonna suck. I don't know, but in my life it has been easy to write off my own feelings and be like 'Oh, well, maybe it wasn't actually that bad.'" Involvement in the Center allowed Char to examine her experience, not in isolation, but in the context of similar experiences of those around her. She continued describing this critical shift in perspective: "But then to be in spaces where you start to see patterns, like it's not just me, it's not just this one person said this one thing to me. It's a bigger system."

The ability to understand and process one's own experiences of marginalization, not as personal or isolated, but as artifacts of culture and products of patterns of exclusion is empowering. It provides the individual with opportunities to act for cultural change, to actively support and create more inclusive spaces, and to identify, and either avoid or overcome existing obstacles to participation and success.

Beyond the ability of individuals to affect change, LGBT Centers serve to build communities of resistance and activism that allow individuals to connect with others who

share a goal of culture change, both on the campus and beyond it. And on campuses, there are similarities in the agenda of cultural evolution required for full inclusion of those with marginalized sexual and gender identities. Centers regularly address issues of campus infrastructure and systems, advocate for the diversification of campus constituencies, and foster understanding and attitudes inclusive of LGBTQ+ people.

Mission Alignment

For institutions, missions serve as a way of conveying purpose and priority. They also serve to inspire and direct the activities of institutional actors who translate the mission into a deliverable set of activities and services. Each institution's mission may vary slightly, although education, research and service remain at the core of most colleges and university agendas. Many also focus on developing graduates' capacities of leadership, citizenship and cultural competence. Centers have dual role in service to the institutional mission. First, by aligning Center activities with core mission outcomes, Centers create vital contributions that further mission goals through an LGBTQ+ inclusion lens. Second, Centers serve an ombuds role, to critique the inclusion practices to which institutions commit themselves, and to point out associated opportunities, progress and obstacles.

<div align="center">Ally Development</div>

The second Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that of ally development, and four sub-themes became evident: Activating and empowering LGBTQ+ people; interventions and strategies targeting heterosexual and cisgender people; encouraging an LGBTQ+ campus presence; and fostering visibility. The following will consider the theme broadly and then differentiate and discuss each

sub-theme. Leaders of social change movements grounded in securing equal rights for marginalized groups have long understood that progress and success for these movements are strongly associated with the movement's ability to engage and activate support from individuals from within majority groups who can serve as advocates and allies to the cause. These allies are often able to leverage social capital that exceeds the capacity of group members to create necessary change unassisted.

Likewise, as Centers seek to establish inclusive campus climates for LGBTQ+ students and others, cultivating campus support for the presence and contributions of LGBTQ+ people is essential. Ally development activities provide normative, accurate information to create a foundation for support of equality, and grows the coalition of people invested in equality and opportunity for LGBTQ+ people to catalyze progress on goals around inclusion.

Encouraging campus presence of LGBTQ+ members, establishing educational panels, and cultivating safe zone programs are nearly universal ways that Centers work to foster environments that welcome and embrace LGBTQ+ people. Center staff also work to implement additional interventions and strategies that cultivate a commitment to equality among heterosexual and cisgender people, as well as efforts that activate and empower LGBTQ+ people in similar ways.

The following considers the ways that Centers activate and empower members of the LGBTQ+ identity continuum, then explores interventions and strategies targeting heterosexual and cisgender people, before concluding with an examination of how Centers encourage an LGBTQ+ campus presence.

Activating and Empowering LGBTQ+ People

Groups associated with social change movements are rarely as monolithic as the histories that are written about them. Histories tend to simplify complex historical movements, such as Women's Liberation or Civil Rights by describing their most common denominators and major themes. Similarly, the struggle for Gay Rights has drawn pioneers from a broad coalition of identity groups–gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans people, asexuals, queers, various groups of individuals who present as gender non-conforming, intersex people, those representing middle sexualities, pansexuals, omnisexuals, etc.–whose commonality is that they experience social marginalization grounded in concepts of heteronormativity and the gendered binary. Perhaps more than other groups that are constituted from coalitions drawn together through change movements, those cast as LGBTQ+ people may be less familiar with the unique experiences and perspectives of others who share that label than others. Even the common experience of marginalization and social stigmatization that binds the movement may be experienced in dramatically different ways for some groups than others.

A critical educational role for Centers is helping LGBTQ+ people to learn about themselves and their own identities, as well as about others within LGBTQ+ communities. This research project provided examples of Centers educating LGBTQ+ people about: the history and progress of the movement, particularly in the context of higher education and their own institution; resilience and resisting oppression; identity; and acting as allies to other LGBTQ+ people.

History and progress. Every campus is a product of its unique history, and its social context. For current students, understanding how a campus climate has come to be, and the sorts of progress that has been made can help set realistic expectations for what can be presently expected and the pace of change ahead. Education around history is combined with networking between classes for Sheryl, as she invites LGBTQ+ alums back to campus to engage with current students. These conversations naturally turn to campus experiences that are shared and different. Almost always, says Sheryl, alums "are able to come back and say, 'Wow! The campus has moved forward in a great way.' And their experience wasn't nearly as positive."

And while the problems may have changed, some of the solutions that alums can impart to current students remain the same. Seeking networks of support, identifying priorities and advocating for change, mitigating microaggressions, and persisting are timeless methods that alums and current students can employ in change processes. The added value for Sheryl is that "they're able to share with the students today to talk about the importance of a Center like this, and how had it been here, it would have been a marked difference for them in their own lives." These conversations motivate alums to contribute time, talent and treasure in support of a campus they see as evolving positively and often targeting supports, such as Centers, in which they find value, and it motivates students not to take for granted supports that appear institutional and steadfast.

Resilience and persistence. Developing critical skills that ultimately bolster resilience and foster persistence are addressed at length in Chapter 6, but failure to introduce them in the context of Centers' educational outcomes would leave the discussion incomplete. Even in the relatively safe environment of a college campus,

LGBTQ+ students experience marginalization and daily microaggressions and obstacles to their participation and persistence. Those with intersectional identities that draw on additional underrepresented identities may encounter additional layers of resistance.

Institutionalized systems of oppression and the barriers that they create can seem insurmountable, and Centers can help cultivate strategies that students can employ to be successful both on the campus and beyond it, "because it certainly is a skill to navigate whiteness, to navigate heteronormativity, to navigate these structures that aren't" just reproduced on campus, asserted Jordan. These are structures of resistance that exist in concert with the gender binary, with heteronormativity, with social constructs of sex and gender and race and class. Learning resilience and practicing persistence, even as you are advocating for or demanding change, can be the difference between a life and a life lived well.

For Char, this process of learning has been layered in multiple ways. "Being able to talk about experiences and name them as homophobic or racist or sexist," came first, she recalled, which inspired her curiosity and exploration of the tools of oppression, and "having the working knowledge of how homophobia can manifest itself and to learn how to name that and call it out. Yeah, I've definitely gotten more comfortable with calling people out." Char describes awareness of marginalization as a prerequisite to understanding the ways that individual acts contribute to systems and institutions that oppress. She couples these observational and analysis skill sets with communication strategies and a vocabulary appropriate to advocacy and obstruction.

And yet understanding herself as a marginalized person has also highlighted, at times, her own complicity in reifying structures that marginalize others, as she

214

acknowledges "getting called out" herself by peers for these transgressions. "And then, there, it's more like racist and classist stuff that I do. Or definitely transphobic. That also," she continues, sounding almost confessional. "So, in the ways that I'm privileged, I am learning to get better at owning up to my mistakes." Which is just what she would demand from anyone else. Accepting one's role and complicity in oppression and working to change the structures that enforce the status quo is what she expects of herself, and what she expects of others.

Veronica took an entirely different approach to connecting educational activities of Centers to resilience and persistence. In discussing where on campus Veronica encountered resistance to her identity, she acknowledged having "struggled with that for some time." When asked to share more, it took her a moment to find the right words. "Sometimes the things that are most hurtful to you, you do it yourself." It was such a simple observation, but filled with so much truth neither of us spoke for a moment, before she continued, "so for me, being an ally, going through the workshops that [safe zone] offers, I learned to be an ally to others but also figuring out how to self love, how to be an ally to identities that I have."

Identity development and identity efficacy. While further sections of Chapter 5 expand on the specific ways that students experience identity development through Center interactions, some discussion of this process is required as a function of articulating the educational purpose of Centers and the ways that Centers provide educational value to LGBTQ+ students. Creating intentionally queer space, or space reserved for contact with and between students who share identities or identity commonalities, is an important way that Centers create educational opportunity and

215

value. These spaces allow students to share openly, to be vulnerable, and to define and refine what it means to be uniquely themselves with others who are taking part in the same self-exploration.

Megan, who considers herself an extrovert and frequently hangs out in her Center, often initiates conversations with other students in that space. She loves to learn about other people, and often asks people to talk about their identities. Initially Megan understood herself as a lesbian, because it was the only model that she knew. Yet it didn't quite fit for her; it never felt right. "Even though I'm a female, I'm not hyper-feminine, I'm not very feminine at all. I can be. I can be emotional, but I wouldn't really say that I'm super masculine either," she explains. "I never really heard of the term 'bigender queer'" until she was exposed to it in the Center, she recalled, "and that kind of made me realize that that's what I am." She wears the term like a second skin now and her tone reinforces the comfort it gives her. "It's kind of nice to have a term to kind of have that defined. I mean, it's really cool to wonder who you are and what to define yourself, and then to hear a definition that fits you, is nice."

Noting that so much effort and energy goes into educating others about LGBTQ+ people, something that Jade recognizes as beneficial and valuable, she is conflicted. "I think that we would like to see more of supporting for our own communities. I wanna be able to see people who have my identities and are part of my communities and just celebrate and be together." To that end, Jade has begun gathering together students who share her identity for regular time together that is largely unstructured and informal. "I think it's just really important to have these spaces for students to feel." She is adamant that this is not space to think or dialogue or deconstruct, although she admits that once

216

together, sharing and laughing often result in higher-level conversations. When that happens, she smirks, she has to remind the group of the value of just being together, just existing together. "Sometimes I'm just like, 'I don't wanna do educational stuff anymore. I just wanna hang out.'"

On her campus, Karla has worked hard to encourage a culture of such sharing across a number of identity groups. There is power in gathering people together with others who can best understand their unique experiences and provide encouragement, advice and mutual support. Empowering students to support one another through these sponsored identity collectives was symbolic of the institution's inclusion mission, but also created broader bases of support for individuals. Sharing responsibility for providing general support ultimately lightened the load for staff, who could then re-invest in alternate efforts that benefit the community as a whole.

Marcus encountered the same problem through a different lens. Within his Center, most or many activities were conducted as open to all participants. But there were important conversations that LGBTQ+ people needed to have just with one another concerning identity, identity politics and queer community on campus. Critical opportunities for dialogue were being missed, and Marcus recalled that "one of our students has kind of lamented a little bit that because we get so many allies or non-queer identified folks who are coming to our programs, the conversations that are had always end up being directed at allies." The Center saw a need to respectfully honor the participation of allies, but to ask them to step back on occasion to allow LGBTQ+ people gather and dialogue just as a community. Finding the right tone and message was challenging, and some allies were initially confused and resentful. But strategic

217

conversations and continued efforts to engage allies in important work helped the Center

to find queer space for queer people and accepting space for all invested in LGBTQ+

inclusion.

Allies for other identities. The struggle to be treated equally may be all we have

in common as LGBTQ+ people. What do gays and lesbians have to discuss? What can

asexuals share with pansexuals? Of course, these are simplistic questions and false

dichotomies, but they are perpetuated and reinforced through identity tensions and

politics that play out within LGBTQ+ communities. In many ways, members of some

coalition cohorts may have little in common with and little understanding or

identification with the experiences of those in others. Yet we are bound up in this

movement together, and expected to embody ally behaviors with and for one another.

Centers can help create space for dialogue and development.

Being marginalized for your sexual orientation or gender identity doesn't make

you an expert in understanding either concept. Just like heterosexual and cisgender

persons, LGBTQ+ people have a lot to learn about ourselves and others who fall within

the acronym. "Getting students to really engage across difference can sometimes be

difficult," admitted Jordan:

> Really having to sit with the idea that, "Oh, wow. I have transphobia in me that I
> have to unlearn." Or, "I have racism that I have to unlearn." Or what-have-you. Or
> even getting into the idea, like, "I still have heterosexism and change and stuff
> that I have to unlearn," can be a little bit trying…. And I'm still trying to get
> students in particular to feel more, right? Instead of just right in their heads. So
> what does this actually mean for you? And actually getting them to, yeah, stop
> talking about the theory as much as to actually talk about what are they
> experiencing?

Jordan points out that framing a developmental trajectory and bridging the gap between

theoretical understanding and lived experience are two learning outcomes that Centers

might employ in helping LGBTQ+ people make sense of themselves and one another.

Mary leads a discussion group of queer women of color, and the group constantly

struggles at the margins of their diversity, "because I think there's a tendency for us to

talk about… what we relate to. So making an effort to understand identities that we didn't

necessarily [embody ourselves]." Conversations are most beneficial and most challenging

when they highlight both common experiences and understandings and also that which

separates group members' mutual understanding. Experience has shown Mary that in

these later cases, extra effort must be applied in "making sure that we're not being, that

we're not excluding people in the way we talk about things, just being a lot more

deliberate with language than maybe we thought we had to be originally. I think that's

really beneficial." Mary acknowledges that her own skills as a group facilitator have

grown exponentially as she helps the group maintain a healthy dynamic, even in the

context of challenging dialogues.

Char notes the importance of recognizing intersectionality, as well. Her Center

works closely with other identity centers on campus, and "does a really good job of

saying this isn't a one-or-the-other issue." Rather the message that she hears is "we have

resources for queer students, we have resources for Students of Color, we have resources

for white students committed to racial justice and straight students committed to LGBTQ

issues." Chelsea has seen students find space in her Center to develop empathy and

interrogate their own responses towards trans peers. She has seen students struggle with

"this is what I'm feeling and that there is a place for that." She underscores that giving

students room to develop and grow and change their minds and attitudes is essential to

219

educational practice in her Center.

Cultivating awareness of and modeling appropriate responses to difference is essential practice for Centers. Particularly given the pace of change around identity development and the rate at which new conceptualizations of sexual orientation and gender identity are coming to be, perhaps the best expertise that we can have as allies is the ability to be adaptable and willing to both unlearn and relearn what we think we already know.

Interventions and Strategies Targeting Heterosexual and Cisgender People

Social change and acceptance for marginalized groups, including LGBTQ+ students is largely a function and product of the degree to which progressive attitudes are cultivated within majority communities who are then able to serve as advocates and allies to the cause. In this case, heterosexual and cisgender allies who are well informed about the community and the value of LGBTQ+ inclusion are often able to marshal social change that exceeds the capacity of group members themselves. Participants described Centers' use of campaign-based awareness, active programming and visibility activities, and methods of developing empathy for LGBTQ+ experiences and trust with LGBTQ+ communities as ways that Centers helped cultivate support among heterosexual and cisgender people.

Campaign based awareness. Many research participants described the value of awareness campaigns and informational displays to convey important principles and information broadly. A number of participants, including Lindsey, Max, Eric and Brett all spoke of informational campaigns around the value and necessity of gender inclusive bathrooms that meet the needs of trans students and others on campus who need flexible

220

or private bathroom spaces.

Lindsey and Max both talked about the need to explain the reasoning behind the designation of bathrooms as gender inclusive, and Max, in particular talked of helping convey to cisgender people appropriate "rules of engagement" as they encounter potentially gender non-conforming others in bathroom spaces. Eric took this necessity a step further. Rather than just sharing information passively, Eric worked with facilities staff to help prepare them to attend to concerns expressed as they encountered bathroom patrons, to counter concerns and generally provide basic education.

Brett discussed the importance of including information in the campaign about the impact of state and local laws at odds with campus policy that put trans people at legal risk. Noting his masculine presentation at odds with his legal sex, he somewhat jokingly says "if I walked into a women's restroom, I would terrify people." Nodding his head, he affirms. "Yes," and laughs before resuming his thought. "But I'm breaking the law, and students are breaking the law on campus." It's an issue of concern, and one that trans people alone are relatively powerless to resolve.

Jordan described a second effort that targeted the power of language by exploring and unpacking commonly used pejorative words and phrases that serve as microaggressions to marginalized groups. Framed as "more than words" the campaign challenged users of these phrases to reconsider the impact and harm generated collectively over time as the concepts they evoked contributed to a culture of intolerance. "It's not about saying necessarily, 'This is a wrong word or a good word…,' because language is fluid, but it's about actually engaging in conversations with each other about, 'What do we mean? Where does that come from?'"

Originating in the Center, the staff used the process of developing the campaign to reach out to partners across the campus. Through collaboration, messages were determined that addressed intersectional concerns, and allies were developed to help promote and articulate major campaign messages, and defend the campaign to its detractors. And judging by the feedback received, the campus community both loved and hated it. A survey distributed to gather feedback had a campus return rate of 40%, suggesting to Jordan that it struck multiple nerves and generated a high level of awareness and dialogue, which is exactly the result that was intended.

Both of these examples of raising awareness among and about critical issues that reflect LGBTQ+ interests, provide examples of the complexities and opportunities involved in using multiple modes of engagement to help shape and re-shape attitudes, and ultimately behaviors. In their own way, they further LGBTQ+ visibility and contribute to programming goals, but in different ways than those that engage more actively.

Active programming and visibility. When asked to list top priorities for LGBT Center staff, Marcus responded that "visibility is one thing and then just getting folks to talk about things." For Marcus, this means providing entertainment and social events with a secondary, educational purpose. Inviting major LGBTQ+ speakers to campus that have a national presence and a cultural buzz serves multiple purposes. Such speakers create LGBTQ+ visibility and get people talking, as Marcus points out. But they also raise important social issues, challenge heteronormativity, and focus attention on LGBTQ+ lives and culture, if even briefly.

Likewise, Trevor uses programming to center the margins, both within the LGBTQ+ community and beyond. Asexual Awareness Week "was one of my first

222

examples of, or my first experiences with, building a whole event around a subgroup within the LGBTQ spectrum." Organizing a panel and conversation on an identity he doesn't embody provided opportunities for Trevor to expand his identity knowledge and awareness, because while the campus presence of asexuals was relatively invisible, "I still felt it was necessary to have their voices heard on the panel and celebrate this national Asexual Awareness Week." Jordan, similarly, talked of the value of programming around particular identities to help bring visibility and share knowledge, as through an annual event called Trans Day of Silence.

Both Brett and Jordan discussed the value of more general programs that encourage skill building around how to interact with LGBTQ+ people. "A lot of people don't know how to address LGBTQ people," noted Brett, adding, "it's not necessarily negative attitudes towards, but just how to help people improve their interactions." Jordan leverages events such as the coordination of Pride Month to invite collaborators from other areas of student affairs and faculty departments.

G programmed several coordinated activities that coalesced around the idea of Science With Pride. Visibility in this case was important because of a lack of awareness of openly LGBTQ+ role models within science disciplines. Personal identities of scientists are often withheld or disregarded because objective research is value-neutral. Personal characteristics of researchers are therefore often deemed irrelevant. But G felt differently. "This is important because we need role models to be able to influence other LGBT students that are coming into the sciences, or that might not think that it's for them because they don't see any other gays." Drawing together a panel of LGBTQ+ identified researchers at varying levels of their careers, G facilitated a conversation about "visibility

in the sciences, and how it's like to be an LGBT student, does it even matter being an LGBT student in the sciences? Because it's very well-known that it's your studies first, everything else comes second."

The panel discussion was attended by the chair of G's academic department, and about two weeks later, the two of them connected and the professor shared that she enjoyed the discussion. G recalled that "she said that it was interesting, that she would like to get more involved in how to become a," G pauses, almost embarrassed. "Well she said 'a friend'" and breaks into gales of laugher. G shared information about safe zone and encouraged her chair to take part in an upcoming training. G is hopeful that participation in safe zone by the department chair will motivate other faculty to become involved and ultimately for the department to grow more supportive.

Develop empathy for LGBTQ+ experiences and trust with LGBTQ+ communities. Although it was only mentioned by one participant, the ways that Centers cultivate empathy for the experiences of LGBTQ+ people to foster trusting, mutual relationships was of such importance, that it bears exploration as an educational outcome of Center contact with heterosexual and cisgender communities. Jordan described this as encouraging allies to move beyond checklist thinking to actually practicing authentic allyship:

> It's not just like, "Oh, I just gotta remind myself that this is one of those multicultural things to do. Like, I need to brush up on my history of civil rights or something like that." This really does impact how [LGBTQ+] people see you, how they trust you or don't trust you, what they talk to you about, what they don't talk to you about, as well as the learning opportunities, or what they can get out of even the same degree that they're getting from [the institution], that someone else is getting.

This version of ally behavior truly understands that equality for marginalized

224

people is actually just as liberating for the privileged people already centered. It is beyond consideration of oppression on a thinking level and actually feeling the constraints of heteronormativity that award social privilege. Without experiencing vulnerability and interrogating privilege and social position, Jordan argues, you remain in a place of "your own guilt and shame. You have to get into that part of it, because if you don't get to that part of it, you're gonna always find ways of excusing or dodging what is the underlying issues." And the underlying issue isn't a male body engaging in sexual contact with another male body, or the degree to which sexual orientation or gender identity is influenced more by environment or biology; those are distractions. The underlying issue is this issue of rigid social controls and institutional systems that create deterministic outcomes for all of us.

Contributing to course content. Faculty often reach out to request Center sponsored contributions to their courses. "Education looks like and sounds like different things," shared Eric, "and it's often dependent upon what a specific professor or class might need at a different time." From crafting lectures on the power of marketing to the LGBTQ community for a marketing class to discussing the persecution of LGBTQ people during the Holocaust in a history course, the Center gladly provides "focused educational or targeted educational pieces."

Likewise, Shannon has given classroom "presentations on queer art history" and is often called upon to contribute to conversations that emphasize "understanding of the differences between gender, gender identity, sex and sexuality, or sexual orientation" through disciplinary lenses of sociology, anthropology and psychology, for instance. Marcus, too, fields "all kinds of requests" from faculty for guest lectures, something that

is recognized and valued by Divisional leaders who strongly encourage "taking whatever happens in here outside of the walls of the Center." This expanded reach that touches students through the classroom that would be otherwise inaccessible to Center outreach and multiplies educational potentials.

Encouraging an LGBTQ+ Campus Presence

Centers themselves are evidence that there is power in presence and visibility. LGBTQ+ and other identity centers are reminders of the commitment a campus has made to inclusion, and also serve to advocate for and direct that progress. They further serve to institutionalize the presence of marginalized and underrepresented people and legitimize their interests in and contributions to institutional dialogues and decisions.

Yet Center staff alone cannot effectively represent the interests of all LGBTQ+ identities and perspectives. Progress around LGBTQ+ inclusion is best served by the ongoing practice of including and empowering LGBTQ+ people in roles across the institution. Jordan and other Center leaders pointed to recruitment of faculty and staff with LGBTQ+ identities as a Center priority. Hiring LGBTQ+ faculty, administrators and staff, and recruiting LGBTQ+ students creates opportunities for those individuals, through the lens of their campus roles, experiences and expertise, to further inclusion goals at the center and margins of their responsibilities. It also extends the reach of LGBTQ+ perspectives in important ways to areas of the institution that Center staff may not have the ability to access.

In addition, resistance to full social participation of marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities is often buffered by normative experiences. Thus when majority people have positive interactions and experiences that include LGBTQ+ people,

226

they are less likely to avoid future interactions with other LGBTQ+ people. For instance, some have pointed to the relatively fast social progress around marriage equality, and the sea change in attitudes on the issue, to the presence, visibility and open participation of LGBTQ+ people in families, workplaces and other social units. Exposure makes the abstract real, and people who once imagined radical LGBTQ+ extremists working to diminish the sanctity of straight marriage are now able to see the very real life commitments made to partners by their sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, supervisors, co-workers and employees, church congregation and social group members, and other people of importance to them.

"It's interesting to watch the way people develop," observed Kent, noting a cycle of LGBTQ+ acceptance that he has associated with the academic calendar. "At the beginning of the year there were all those little microaggressions. Now it's the end of the year and there's not very many." Kent posits that the original world view that accompanies people to the campus gets eroded by contact with others they have perceived as different or with whom they have had little interaction or experience. Over time, Kent suggested, peers discover, "wait, there's other things out there; there's other ideas and concepts and beliefs." This exposure to otherness, including LGBTQ+ identities, challenges preconceptions and Kent sees his peers more often adjust in positive ways than not, as he shared "that usually they come around, but it takes some time. It's all a matter of patience in the long run…. People have just gotten used to the concept and the idea, probably changed their world perspective a little bit."

Brett related students growth around LGBTQ+ acceptance to his own experiences encountering a "sea of Color" on campus after growing up in an overwhelmingly white

rural hometown. "I came here from a town that maybe had all of two or three Black families living there. I didn't see Color, unless I went to… a bigger city." Brett owns his privilege as he recalls instances where his words and actions were hurtful to Peers of Color, not out of intention, but out of ignorance. Sheepishly, he admitted, "I just didn't know any better. And thankfully, I had people who took the time to sit down and say, 'Look, that wasn't really, that wasn't exactly appropriate. You just, you don't say things like that.'" In interactions with heterosexual and cisgender peers, Brett extends his own courtesy. "You can tell when people know better and when they don't," he suggested. "You can tell when someone's got venom and when they're actually going into with good intentions because they legitimately want to know and understand." In these latter cases, Brett doesn't bristle at microaggressions around his trans identity, but uses those opportunities to clarify and educate instead. "In order to teach people, you have to expose yourself and you have to be willing take those [offensive] questions."

G sees a similar opportunity and obligation to share knowledge around identity that she has gained from Center activities. She recently recalled an opportunity to share suggested practice around preferred gender pronouns with a peer during informal interactions before class, fully cognizant that other students were attentive to the conversation. The friend shared her confusion around a person who dressed "like a boy" some days and "like a girl" others, asking whether to use "him" or "her" in conversations. G recognized that her friend was well intentioned and trying to do the right thing. "I said, 'Honestly, just go ask. They're not going to get offended if you ask.'" As an alternative, she encouraged the friend to use "them" and "they" in the absence of clarity. While the conversation was ostensibly private, the semi-public venue of a classroom allowed G the

228

opportunity and advantage to engage with a larger audience for the purpose of education. Affirming her own process of learning about identity, and how to respectfully interact with people different from herself, she uses opportunities such as these because she knows that every student won't attend a safe zone training or take the initiative to learn on their own. "At least they were actively listening to what I was saying, because I'm sure they've always had these questions. They just don't have someone to ask them to."

The presence of LGBTQ+ people in roles across the campus provides opportunities for contact and interaction that humanizes and de-mystifies people with marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities for those whose identities are represented in the majority. Contact generates familiarity that deepens to affinity as relationships are formed, friendships are cultivated, mutual interests are explored, and people find value in the presence of the other. This is to suggest that it is not the difference between people that propagates allies, rather it is the commonalities of basic humanity shared between people which makes the difference around sexual orientation or gender identity less substantive. Mere presence encourages ally behavior in this way because friends support friends, come to their defense, and argue for their full inclusion in equitable environments that sustain and value them. This basic support, awareness and advocacy is at the heart of ally development.

Establishing educational panels. In addition to everyday contact and creating a critical presence of LGBTQ+ people, many Centers invite existing LGBTQ+ people on campus to participate as members of educational panels (also referred to as speakers bureaus) that engage students in curricular and co-curricular contexts across the campus. Eric noted that panel members volunteer to "share aspects of their lives and their

229

experiences through the power of narrative autobiography, to help inform about different experiences across diverse communities."

As panels are invited into classrooms and other gatherings to provide information and contact between participants and LGBTQ+ people, often through the lens of course materials or the academic discipline, panelists use the opportunity to engage with peers for the purpose of sharing their stories, answering questions, and emphasizing that differences in sexual orientation and gender identity are normative, important, and create value for people who embrace them.

Ale was enthusiastic as she posited that the educational value of panels was among the most impactful efforts made in shifting attitudes on her campus. "I've talked to people in a lot of my different classes, who are not part of the [LGBTQ+] community, but they talk about how much they've benefited from, and how interested they were in the panels." Panels permit students to query basic information and ask personal questions that they feel appropriately restrained from asking acquaintances or LGBTQ+ students with whom they share basic friendships. These are the sorts of question that might embarrass both the student asking and the student called upon to answer. They involve differentiating sexual orientation and gender identity, establishing definitions for terms, hearing about students' positive and negative experiences as LGBTQ+s, and even asking about physical intimacy and how dating is similar and different in non-heteronormative contexts.

As such panelists are prepared to share openly, to set and honor their personal boundaries, to correct misinformation, and to call out assumptions and privilege in effective ways that don't foreclose dialogue. Faith's thoughtfulness about panels is

accompanied by her belief in their indispensability. "There's a genuineness and an authenticity about the exchange that I think is probably more enlightening than something that's more packaged and formal," she explained, adding, "it's cool because you get to be real kind of spontaneous and off the cuff which is really nice."

While panels are critical ways of broadly engaging students and others who may have had limited contact with LGBTQ+ people, they also develop important skills among panel members, such as personal confidence, identity efficacy and fortitude. The fact that panel conversations are both structured and unpredictable develops panelists' speaking skills. This was true for Kent, who shared, "I definitely was not this well-spoken when I first got here. I wouldn't consider myself as well-spoken to some of my friends. I try hard, I try to keep up." This was also true for Landon, who shared that "for three years I've been doing these panels, and just talking about [my identity] in that way. I've become more confident about just coming out to people, and things like that. So I think it's increased my resilience, if anything."

Ale developed speaking skills as well as self-confidence. "In the panels, we tell our coming out story first, and I remember when I was getting trained for the panel and I was telling my story just to two other people who were in the group with me." It surprised Ale that speaking about her identity created a lot of anxiety. "I was so nervous. I think I was nervous to be judged or just nervous in general, because I hadn't even said the story out loud in so many years," she recalled. Her panel service also led to thoughtful exploration of how she articulates her identity to others:

> When we first started doing the panels, what I kept on saying is that I guess I would identify as bisexual, but I think even then I wasn't as informed as I am now, and I think that I'm really not so much of a believer in labels. But if I had to

231

put a label on it, I think I would identify as pansexual, because I've been with many different people, people who identify as different things, and I've been very open to it, and it's just not a barrier to me–how a person identifies or gender expression or gender identity, anything like that–it's not so much a big deal to me. And so, I either choose not to label myself as anything, or I say pansexual.

Ale's process of sharing her story with others through paneling created a powerful opportunity to consider and develop her own identity understanding. Now after having been on many panels, rather than feeling nervous, Ale is confident about describing herself, her identity and her experiences. Faith gained self-confidence and affirmation from her experiences as a panelist, noting that her participation was valuable because "I felt like we were helping to help people be more informed, but also just to have the opportunity to be out and representing myself and people like me." Serving as a panelist has become, for her, one of the more positive campus experiences she has had as an LGBTQ+ community member. "I had the opportunity to be on two panels this semester. And those were both really good experiences, really positive experiences."

Beyond the powerful potential that she sees for panels to educate peers, and the benefits that she herself has gained, at this point Ale sees her ongoing participation in panels as mostly fun, "and I think that's really cool because I think that's the main way that the Center is working towards raising awareness, because other people are not going to become aware if they're not educated."

Cultivating safe zone programs. Whereas panels reach out to engage and educate the campus community broadly through the introduction of LGBTQ+ people, the sharing of personal stories, and the opportunity to ask and receive answers to questions, their educational goals and potential are bounded. Panels may invite those who experience them to ask additional or deeper questions, to understand and value the

232

LGBTQ+ people in their lives, and to make a commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion and seek social change that furthers equality efforts. To that end, safe zone programs have become a way that campuses provide basic and ongoing education for the purpose of developing stronger allies to the cause of LGBTQ+ inclusion and equity. Safe zone programs often pre-date the establishment of Centers themselves, as they have long attempted to create "safe space" and networks of formal and informal support for students, faculty and staff who are LGBTQ+. This reflects Eric's professional experience, as he posited "safe zone programs tend to pre-date Centers, often by years." He argues safe zones are easier to establish on campus "because they're generally easier to maintain, they are not housed in any kind of institutional dedicated space. They can be just volunteer run and led, and whatnot." Safe zone programs also serve multiple needs simultaneously, so they are efficient in that regards, offering campus value that is symbolic, educationally purposeful and personally supportive.

Symbolic value. The symbolic value of safe zone indicates that the campus is "supportive of those students, faculty and staff who are members of the [LGBTQ+] community, who are allies of the community," argues Sheryl, and "that is absolutely huge, because at one point I think there was a President here a number of years ago who said 'We don't have to worry about that issue at [this institution] because there are no LGBT people here.'" Sheryl shares the story and then holds her breath. It is evident that she can't imagine a contemporary campus leader making such a claim. Without dismissing its power, she lays that past to the side, and picks up with the current success of the campus safe zone program, which utilizes trained volunteers to develop allies as they deliver a consistent curriculum. The leadership lens she brings to her cabinet

233

position focused on institutional diversity and inclusion in the curriculum and co-curriculum articulates that LGBTQ+ people are indispensable and she has strongly advocated for a safe zone program that reflects this ethos. She is pleased to see a campus today where safe zone trainers "very successfully share the message in the safe zone training across the campus, and it is now in demand from lots of places. And I find that that's huge given the culture of this campus."

Educational purpose. Beyond symbolic value, safe zone programs are purposeful modes of educational outreach, and often have a structured, intentional curriculum and associated learning outcomes that reflects campus climate and environment, needs of LGBTQ+ campus cohorts, and the capacity and potential of members to master and make meaning of program material. Common elements may include: exploring sexual and gender identity; fostering helping skills and support techniques; reducing microaggressions; unpacking power, privilege and intersectionality; promoting activities related to social change and LGBTQ+ equality.

Craig expresses a basic purpose of safe zone, which is creating comfortability with concepts and experiences common to LGBTQ+ people. For him, it's a process "of just getting people cognizant of your language, and that there are different identities and different expressions and different sexualities out there." Tara notes opportunities within the safe zone curriculum to focus efforts on emerging identities and those identities that are most marginalized. On her campus, safe zone focuses on trans students, she says, "because I think they get it the worst." Providing accurate information about gender identity is one part of this training, but so is creating expectations around appropriate engagement with trans people, which includes identifying microaggressions and ways to

234

diminish them. This level of awareness empowers safe zone members. "So if I hear someone say something, not directed at me, but at my best friend, and the way he presents," Tara posits, but it's clear that she is speaking, not abstractly, but from experience, "I can help him combat that, because I'm now more aware of the trans community, the issues and the right way to handle things."

A common experience for LGBTQ+ people is coming out, and Trevor related that this is a focus of the curriculum in the program he coordinates, "because I know coming out can be such a difficult time for some people, and it's also liberatory, if that's a word." In this context, it is a perfect word, and powerfully captures the nuanced paradox of coming out as both a risk and a reward. Trevor underscores why he sees it as a fundamental element of the curriculum. "I'm learning that coming out is so different for different people. And it's so specific to their needs when they're coming out."

Trevor discusses that being an ally to the LGBTQ+ community is not a monolithic stance. Variances among and between identities and the ways that individuals embody them means that people must choose to be allies in multiplistic ways. By embracing and advocating for full social inclusion of people without regard for sexual orientation or gender identity. But also by being allies to gays, allies to lesbians, allies to bisexuals, to trans people, to asexuals, to non-binary pansexuals–to committing to learning about individual people and serving as allies to them individually. Trevor voices this dual approach that considers ally development in both its macro and micro incarnations:

> I think that our safe zone training is great for group advocacy, because we talk about how to create safe spaces. We talk about, in detail, about the nuances of how a space could be safe maybe for gay, lesbian, bisexual or other sexual

minorities and not necessarily a safe space for trans and genderqueer folks and people outside of the gender binary.

Safe zone curricula also continue to evolve as campus climate changes, student populations and needs shift, and programmers identify additional opportunities. When Jade first encountered safe zone on her campus, it really considered LGBTQ+ identity in isolation from the power structures that inscribe and marginalize it, or the ways that sexual and gender identity intersect with other identity constructs. After "some pushback from staff about talking about white privilege or talking about intersectionality, and stuff like that," Jade reported that the current program curriculum reflects a greater awareness of the importance of social positioning, but the current approach has also reinscribed that worldview among its creators, "and so, now I don't see that as much within staff. And I think that's just reflective of where our heads are now." Yet for Jade, current satisfaction with this curriculum heralds additional change. "I think they are feeling more comfortable," she says, contemplatively, "but I still think we should do more."

Marcus has a similar experience working with colleagues to find the right learning outcomes for his campus program. "We did a major edit last summer. And it's something I'm pretty proud of because I think we're in a good place." It wasn't the first iteration of change for Marcus, who has had involvement as a student, a trainer, and now a Center staff person responsible for the program's implementation. "It had always been a pretty big training. It started out as six hours, then they got it down to two hours but really it wasn't long enough." Marcus felt like the program was reflective of the period in which it was developed, focusing mostly on individual identities and helping skills. His own experiences had opened new doors of understanding for him, and a change in Center

leadership provided a catalyst for program redesign. With encouragement from his supervisor, he says, "we totally took a different approach and did a power and privilege approach with the training…. It's two and a half hours so there's more activity and more discussion." The changes revitalized participation and existing, long-term members were drawn back into dialogue by the new content. Marcus reported that positive feedback had been strong, and only minor adaptations had accompanied the first year of implementation.

In yet another incarnation, Max described a safe zone program approach that educated the campus community on issues of difference far afield of those bounded by core content addressing gender identity and sexual orientation. "They had one on autism and working with students with autism. And they've had them on gender issues, and they've had them on different kinds of race issues. And they've had them on different kinds of disability things," he recalled. "There's all sorts of differences, so it's on intersections of those things."

Jordan described using safe zone to problematize the gendered binary and social constructions of sex by challenging participants to engage their understandings through their lived experiences. In this way, participants were asked to consider "what are our constructs of how sex [as a social construct] works, right? Which is more concept but still, even then, there was still a lot of pair and group work, getting people to actually talk about their own experiences." This is a much more powerful conversation, and opens doors to transformation for participants, rather than simply positing "that this exists and, 'Oh I have a new vocabulary word to learn.' No, it's not vocabulary," Jordan insists, asserting that the safe zone training should demand that participants ask themselves

237

important questions. "It's about what have you known about yourself and what you haven't known? What do you need to unlearn? We try to put it into that type of framework."

Networks of support. Safe zone program curriculums are as varied as their campuses, but universally work to engage broad acceptance of LGBTQ+ people as they engage and activate allies. Beyond educational efforts, safe zone programs and participants provide personal support as they create networks, foster relationships, and serve as counterspaces. Eric aptly frames the essential ways that a community of LGBTQ+ and supportive allies can serve to bolster individuals:

> I think the access to information and the readily available staff and allies that people could go and speak to, creates an environment where students feel safe enough to ask questions, engage in conversations that they have never been able to elsewhere, and whether that's with peers or with individuals who are employees or just outside community members, I think they're making deep connections here that they don't find in their home spaces.

As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the creation of counterspaces, or environments where LGBTQ+ people can express themselves authentically and find unequivocal acceptance from others, can have a significant positive impact. While a campus LGBT Center may serve as a physical counterspace, and others may be found in other areas of campus that embrace and celebrate LGBTQ+ people, as constituted by the network of people connected to and through its programming, can help to generate and sustain counterspace, at least for a time, in almost any campus location. This is perhaps the program's most powerful promise and potential.

To that end, safe zone programs often make outreach to seek partnerships with vital campus constituencies that have a strong focus on shaping student culture and

providing critical services. Students come to campus to learn, and therefore targeting classroom spaces and faculty inclusion is critical for safe zone programs. When Brett came out as a transman to his academic department, his transition required some reciprocal learning by faculty. "It was very much a learning process for them. They weren't upset by it, they were mostly upset because they didn't know how to respond, right?" Safe zone sponsored a department-wide training that provided a baseline of knowledge, education and support that helped answer faculty questions, develop empathy and support skills, and ease Brett's transition. The training, of which Brett was a part, "set the tone for how to work with LGBTQ students. That was really cool to come in and have institutional intervention into a department and they were all on board with it." In practice, for Aiden, his academic department home is now a safe zone for his identity as well, and that acceptance and support has gone a long way towards enabling his persistence.

Housing spaces and residential life can be challenging environments for LGBTQ+ students, as well. Residence hall communities are often characterized by population density, individual freedom to come and go with ease, and permissive attitudes encouraged by cohort characteristics such as youth, alcohol use, and attitudes towards risk-taking. Students in housing are also reflections of the hostile and homophobic culture from which they are constituted, and this is further exacerbated by the fact that residence halls often draw younger students who have had less socialization around campus practices, ethos and expectations related to inclusion. Thus, safe zone programs often seek to invite participation by residence hall staff.

This was reinforced for Spryte, whose twin also has a marginalized sexual

239

identity. Although they lived on different residence hall floors, both came out in their first year. While Spryte felt supported and included following their disclosure, which included a name change, Spryte's sister experienced a chilly climate. "I think it really depends on your RA and how much your RA is willing to stand for you. My RA was incredibly inclusive, so far so that she went to get safe zone trained after I came out." It was Spryte's perception that their RA "wanted to make sure that she didn't marginalize anybody. And then she started doing programs that were more inclusive." Spryte recalled that the floor "had a very girly door decorations or whatever. She switched mine to be more neutral and switched my name on mine and didn't say anything to anybody, she just did it." Being the recipient of these small efforts had a big impact on Spryte's feelings of being included and valued, but they acknowledged everyone isn't so fortunate. "I got really lucky and I know that."

Similarly, Chelsea felt that her identity was targeted by members of a sorority, who used their affiliation to make her life miserable for a period of time, and ultimately necessitated her social reinvention. As groups rigidly grounded in the gender binary, fraternities and sororities are heteronormative, and have the potential to police social expectations around gender identity and sexual orientation. After her experiences, and similar experiences reported by other students, Chelsea is pleased that in partnership with leaders of fraternities and sororities, safe zone "is doing some things to make Greek Life more inclusive… which I think it's phenomenal, and hopefully they can help spread the word and just make it more inclusive."

Campus health and counseling providers also serve students in critical ways. Yet knowledge and support of LGBTQ+ communities cannot be assumed of health care

professionals. Brett has both advocated for broader service availability for procedures and

services of interest to trans students on his campus, as well as development of sensitivity

and knowledge related to meeting the needs of LGBTQ+ populations. "There's a huge

gap between students and staff in a lot of ways," Brett pointed out, in describing the

disconnect between where health professionals see themselves and the experience of

students on campus. "I think those are both really important things," and bear on his

outreach in providing professional development through safe zone that bridges the gap.

Safe zones are powerful opportunities for Centers and campuses to further

LGBTQ+ inclusion goals and practices. As Eric shares, the impact of safe zone programs

is immediate and meaningful. "What's so great about it, is being able to hear students

talk… about walking down a hallway, and seeing placards that say 'safe zone' on their

faculty member, or their graduate assistant, or their TA's, or their friend's door." Those

placards mean that students have places to go for support, and people that welcome them.

Further, Eric, continues, "that intentional message changes how they feel about the

campus. And that's incredible to hear them mention that, and that it registers and

resonates with them so deeply. I think that's incredible."

<center>Fostering Visibility</center>

Creating visibility for LGBTQ+ people has been a core initiative for motivating

cultural acceptance and inclusion from the earliest days of the social movement. The

concept of celebrating LGBT culture and identity through public marches, parades and

festivals that draw out and make visible the many ways of being gay, lesbian, bisexual,

transgender, queer or otherwise marginalized around sexual orientation or gender identity

has become known as Gay Pride. June is recognized as Gay Pride Month in the United

States and other parts of the world, and serves to host many summer celebrations that create opportunities for identity visibility, the celebration of LGBTQ+ culture and community, and personal and collective expression.

LGBT Centers become a similar physical embodiment and expression of LGBTQ+ visibility on campus, serving both as physical spaces that remind the campus community that LGBTQ+ people belong and are supported on the campus, as well as sponsoring events and opportunities that draw out and explore LGBTQ+ culture and community. Brett concurred, noting for peers, especially those just coming to terms with an LGBTQ+ identity, the value of "seeing LGBTQ students in the Center, seeing [Center staff] and other student affairs professionals that are LGBTQ-friendly or LGBTQ-identified and seeing a future for themselves."

Marcus affirmed the power, and ultimately the responsibility, that Centers have for fostering identity pride and campus acceptance through their presence, as he recalled his experience as a new student at a tabling event early in the semester on his campus. "At lunch time they have all the departments and stuff. It took a lot of courage to get up and go talk to the table where the big rainbow flag was." He recalls stepping up to the table, probably somewhat tentatively by his own admission, but none the less seeking validation, affirmation and an identity connection. "It was some guy sitting at the table had leaned back with his arms crossed and kind of looking away, did not wanna make eye contact with me." For the guy behind the table, Marcus might have been one of a stream of students stopping by to gather information, but for Marcus, the courage it took to step up to the table was not reflected by the reception he received. "I stood there for a good 15 seconds," he recalls, and he pauses, reliving the discomfort of that long awkward

moment as he tells the story, "but it felt like ages, and I was just like, eventually I got up the courage to say, 'So do I just take a pamphlet?'"

A flush creeps up his face at this point, and he shakes his head slowly, his voice now reflecting an inner dialogue, asking "what am I doing here at this table?" The Center representative was relatively dismissive. "He was like, 'Yeah,' and that was it. So I took a pamphlet… and I didn't really get involved for another semester." Now as Center staff, this is a story that Marcus tells all of his volunteers as they engage opportunities to recruit interest in the Center, or table with information and resources. Despite Marcus's strong interest in the Center, this single interaction delayed, but didn't derail his involvement. The power and potential of every interaction is important to Marcus, and something that he constantly reinforces to those who represent the Center now. "Every interaction is a recruitment event and not just with the student in front of you, there are other students witnessing that, but also sort of come to understand the Center through their observation."

Shannon is a student who gets to act as the face of her Center through her employment which includes outreach, even off campus. "I think it's things like that where I get to work with the community here" she says, referencing the campus outreach that is more frequent, "but also correspond with people outside the Center who are doing really larger work within our [city and state] region, which has been some of the most exciting stuff, I would say." Because of limited reach and resources, Centers often help connect students to supportive resources on and off-campus that extend the service scope. This further serves to illustrate to students that LGBTQ+ inclusion and support is not limited to the campus alone, and that community entities are LGBTQ+ aware and supportive, as

well.

Sheryl references one such effort that creates visibility on campus for a number of campus departments that seek to assist LGBTQ+ students, as well as off-campus agencies that provide additional services that exceed the ability or mission of the campus. Center collaborations and relationship-building has identified a growing number of these partners, and as such the event has a growing prominence and legitimacy for students and partners alike who join in. "I remember attending the first LGBTQ Call-Out we had in a little room in [the student center]. Then last fall when I attended, it was in one of the ballrooms. I think there were like 60 some tables there." The event is a collaboration between Center staff and LGBT student organization leaders, and beyond introducing students to resources and showing support, the collaborative planning involved in coordinating the event allows staff the chance for "working with the students and helping them think and plan, and showing them there's a bigger and better way to go about doing things just in terms of student advocacy." Brett affirms the value of events such as the Call Out described by Sheryl. "Seeing the visibility of other offices who want to be associated with the LGBTQ Center is also really important. It signals to me, and to other LGBTQ students that [our institution] is actually dedicated to our well being, and to our success on campus."

While there is no substitute for in-person contact with students, there are some cohorts of students unready to reach out personally, and for whom a robust web presence that conveys similar themes of inclusion, education and celebration around culture and identity, and affirms and highlights support and resources is critical. Jordan is the person in his Center responsible for maintaining these resources, and noted the symbolic and real

value of the Center's web presence. Center contact that starts with a patron seeking information on the website can ultimately lead to more interactive and meaningful Center involvement.

Along with facilitating more nuanced dialogues grounded in a primarily educational purpose, Centers often sponsor public, prominent LGBTQ+ celebrations and observances of significance. "National Coming Out Day is the big one, Trans Day of Remembrance." Marcus uses his hand to count them off as he queries his mental calendar. Listing a few others, such as World AIDS Day, Day of Silence and Lavender Graduation, he winds down, concluding. "I think the [Center] does a really good job with… events like that." And then, before forgetting he quickly added, "Oh, Pride Week."

Honoring, celebrating and perpetuating LGBTQ+ culture and the campus community of LGBTQ+ people, these events often feel routinized and predictable to the staff and students that are most closely aligned with Center activities. Yet as predictable, and arguably indispensable, additions to campus inclusion efforts, these opportunities provide campus and individuals value that extends the reach of Centers and serves students and institutions in considerable ways. Spryte described a recent Transgender Day of Remembrance event held on their campus. "We had a bunch of people come out from all over the state to come and hold that candle light vigil for them and it was cold." Spryte mimes an exaggerated shiver for emphasis. "It was so cold and we stayed outside for an hour and a half with candles that burned down to nothing, reading 222 names or something like that." The event was high visibility and high impact, and connected with participants in meaningful ways.

For Craig, Lavender Graduation is an important annual moment for celebration and reflection in a campus season filled with them. As "an honorary ceremony for the graduating seniors who identify as LGBTQ," Lavender Graduation is a relatively recent observance added on his campus, and a growing trend for institutions to recognize the success of marginalized graduates. Along with similar ceremonies that have long existed on some campuses to honor racially underrepresented graduates, Craig shared its simple significance. "You don't have to do it, but if you identify as LGBTQ and you're graduating, it's just like a way that you can just show that that was a part of your identity as being here, too."

Lavender Graduation affirms the persistence of students who have overcome institutional and social barriers to their success. It serves as "that little reminder that, 'Hey, you did it and you're LGBTQ at the same time. Let's take this moment to reflect that.'" Craig pauses, emphasizing the point. Even as masses of students don commencement robes and mortarboards, Craig is quick to affirm the sobering reality that "sometimes this does not happen for LGBTQ kids. Or sometimes this does not happen for Black people, or sometimes this does not happen for [other groups of underrepresented students]."

Beyond serving LGBTQ+ students, Lavender Graduation can resonate powerfully with faculty, staff and other institutional stakeholders. For Michel the ceremony serves as a reminder of social progress. "I think for a lot of us…" he begins, stopping abruptly, pausing to collect his thoughts, and starting again. "One of the things that I always say at Lavender Graduation reception whenever I talk is, 'I was out. I came out 28 years ago when I was a freshman in college.'" While Michel is careful to speak only for himself,

246

for many LGBTQ+ faculty and staff contemporaries, simply being out on campus (and beyond) was activism–a way of moving the visibility agenda forward in the face of overt resistance, isolation and violence on campus, and he recollected at the time "saying, 'I'm making it better for the next generation.'" Continuing, he reflects on the experience that students today have on campus as LGBTQ+ people. These are not easier experiences, but they are different experiences, made so because of the foundation laid by LGBTQ+ students and students-turned-administrators or -faculty who continue to advocate for inclusion and change. "I always get choked up because I'm like, 'This. I did it for you all.'" It accompanies a realization for Michel that his struggle is validated, and that progress has been made and is acknowledged. "It's great to have the young queer folks be like, 'Thank you.' I mean, it's just, it's an amazing intergenerational [moment], and for me to say, 'Wow! The world really has changed.'" To that end, Karla's institution has established recognition components of Lavender Graduation that honor and reflect the support and contributions of faculty and staff in the lives and journeys of LGBTQ+ students.

These participants powerfully illustrate that fostering visibility is of paramount importance in the ways that Centers create essential value on campus and beyond. The following pages explore how sponsoring broadly-targeted campus events that engage LGBTQ+ identity and culture both mainstreams LGBT acceptance and also creates space for the development of queer counterculture. Finally, consideration is given to how Centers are able to create critical visibility through modeling and mentorship, and by the practice of collaboration.

LGBT Mainstreaming and Queer Counterculture

There is value in creating experiences that broadly engage the campus in support of LGBTQ+ people. Prominent celebrations and observances that show serious appreciation for the contributions of people with marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities serve multiple important purposes. First, these activities have the potential to introduce, inform and educate the entire campus about the history and struggle that forms a foundation for the LGBT Rights movement. They also validate and affirm the identities of existing LGBTQ+ people on the campus, and normalize the presence of LGBTQ+ people for majority peers while providing supportive peers and encouraging mentors. Finally, they allow the institution to live out the spirit and letter of policies and statements that promote equal treatment of people and welcome diverse perspectives that form and inform the best campus learning environments.

Center-sponsored events of significance around LGBTQ+ culture and community often mirror and reflect larger social models. Sam, a queer student leader and frequent Center user posited, "Sometimes I feel like the [Center] works really hard to be rainbow, glittery, like, 'Queerness is great!'" And such is true. Often accompanied by rainbow flags and Pride gear, LGBT cultural celebrations like the culture itself are brash, bold, outlandish, unrestrained and unapologetic. Creating space on campus to celebrate events of annual prominence through an LGBTQ+ and campus lens, such as National Coming Out Day, World AIDS Day, International Women's Day, or varied awareness weeks is multifaceted. "One of my first solo events was … the Asexual Awareness Week celebration," recalled Trevor, a Center staff programmer. "That was one of my first examples of, or my first experiences with building a whole event around a subgroup

248

within the LGBTQ spectrum." Noting that it was the first time that the experience of asexual students had been discussed in depth on their campus, Trevor recognized the week's value for people within and external to the community. "I don't identify within the asexual community, but I still felt it was necessary to have their voices heard." Campus communities cycle predictably and frequently–as new members matriculate and others graduate, visibility-related programming invites first contact, and so fundamental messages around inclusion must be reproduced. Learning the basics about this subpopulation, and replacing misinformation with accurate information was a primary goal for people who were like him. As a matter of course, programming with a goal of visibility means repeatedly coming back to the basics—the importance of respect, the value of inviting authentic self-expression, and the individual and collective benefits that accompany breaking down barriers around sexual orientation and gender identity, to name a few.

Brett, a transman who is often assumed based on appearance to be a cisgender man, uses interactions at relatively safe culture-based events with peers as an opportunity to inform and educate. "At some point, I usually out myself. Because I'm usually talking about trans issues. And they're like 'I don't get it' or 'I don't understand how this makes sense,'" he explained. Looking for validation, peers direct these comments generally or towards him. "And I'm like, 'All right, I'm gonna use myself as an example.' And then and it's like you see this frozen moment where they're just like, 'Wait, how did you get in this room?'" The surprising mental shift of well-intentioned peers sees Brett fluidly moving between categories, transformed from "one of us" to "one of them" to "not so different after all" in the space of moments as conversations, questions and answers flow.

From being celebrated, to simply being, the visible presence of marginalized people on those with majority identities creates considerable opportunities for growth, greater understanding, and inclusion.

While creating a space of inclusion among heterosexual cisgender peers is a valuable outcome of these programming opportunities, it is not the singular purpose. In the case of Asexual Awareness Week, Trevor also wanted students to see themselves reflected in Center programming priorities, because "I know we have volunteers who identify as asexual" and certainly any number of additional students who may so identify or who may recognize a way of being that feels familiar by virtue of their exposure to programming content. This is true for students who embody a range of non-normative sexual orientations and gender-identities. "I think a lot of the reasons why I didn't do so well in high school, in regards to this identity, is because I didn't know much about it," shared Veronica. She continued, "I think that just learning more about it, just joining the programs and listening to other people, just actively participating in their events and stuff, has definitely taught me a lot."

In addition, for existing LGBTQ+ people, being the subject and object of these events has additional potential benefits. This kind of programming centers the margins, or focuses attention at least briefly, on people whose lives and existences are often bounded and lived at the margins of society. For those who already openly and actively identify within the LGBTQ+ community, being centered momentarily in the ever-shifting campus attention span holds the potential for validation and affirmation. Particularly, as in Marcus's example of Asexual Awareness Week, such observances have the potential to highlight LGBTQ+ identities that get relegated to the "plus" and often experience erasure

or invisibility within and among the LGBTQ+ community. Further, depending on campus size and constitution, sub communities within the LGBTQ+ coalition may be relatively dispersed with only infrequent interactions. Generalized celebrations of common cultural elements and experiences, such as National Coming Out Day, can draw people together and foster community within the community. For students who are questioning, very tentatively coming out, or seeking to connect to a developing LGBTQ+ identity, celebrations that include and encourage heterosexual and cisgender participation can provide low-risk possibilities for individual engagement.

Speakers series that feature LGBTQ+ people of national and international prominence draw big crowds and focus attention on social progress and cultural obstacles to inclusion. In contrast to many Center-sponsored programs which have a limited reach, Eric referenced a visit from Laverne Cox, a transwoman whose compelling personal narrative and outstanding work in the entertainment industry have thrust her onto the national stage. Citing a campus turnout that resulted in standing room only and overflow seating, he posited, "I don't think anybody imagined that… we would have to turn people away at a venue that holds more than 1,000 people for anything." The Center leveraged the Cox visit to highlight Center and related LGBTQ+ support services. "We talked about [the Center's upcoming move] to a new space, we held up the safe zone placard and asked everybody to go through safe zone training. We did all the things we could do before she got on stage."

Other participants recalled similar events, as did Tara who recounted a campus visit from Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Bishop ordained in the Episcopal Church to much consternation from within and external to the denomination. The visit

251

encapsulated much of the dialogue that framed Tara's experience with LGBTQ+

intolerance. "A lot of times the issues in [my state] are religious issues like 'Well, it's a

sin. So you're going to hell for being gay.'" Robinson provided historical context and a

different lens for applying relevant scriptures that was powerful for Tara, who now has

her own response script, "Well, this was in a different time. They didn't have the concept

of a gay relationship." Robinson's visit was instrumental in helping Tara bridge a gap

that many LGBTQ+ students feel at the intersection of their faith communities and

marginalized identities. "Representing the religious community alongside the gay

community has been very helpful with that."

Large scale observances also create space for resistance as some students,

immersed in identity work use these events to distinguish and articulate in-group and

between-group challenges, and promote queer counterculture that further subverts social

structures of heteronormativity and the gender binary. While the ultimate outcome for

some, LGBTQ+ mainstreaming is, at best, an uncomfortable compromise for others, and

an unacceptable surrendering of the core principles that undergird actual queer liberation

strategies. Jade pushed back about celebrations of Gay Pride and the images that

accompany them, focusing on the safe social narrative that they posit about LGBT people

and our lives. "There's still the stigma about LGBT spaces and communities, that they're

very white, and that they're very cisgender, and they're very male. So, I think that,

regardless of whether or not we're enforcing that, that we have to be cognizant." For Jade,

a queer Woman of Color, her life is lived at the intersections of race, sexual orientation,

gender identity, and class, among other critical identity intersections. She doesn't feel

that she is the face of the LGBT social mainstream, because her equality does threaten the

status quo and its supportive social institutions.

Sam pointed to his campus' sponsorship of National Day of Silence, a day-long observance where LGBTQ+ people withhold their voices to symbolize the social capital lost when LGBT lives are unvalued or undervalued. "Events like that, that are really good for some people," he acknowledged, "I don't think necessarily represents all of the queer people at [my institution], because like not speaking for a day... That is not something that I would value myself." For Sam, the important dialogue around National Day of Silence, for instance, isn't whether or not LGBT voices contribute to the greater social conversation. It's about whether and how this observance serves the best aims of our community in the most effective way. "There would be a lot more of like, talking about why it's happening, but questioning why it's happening, too, and the way it's happening."

Lindsey did not find herself, her views, or others like her represented or served through traditional gay visibility and programming efforts:

> Everything is "big gay party," "big gay dance," "big gay everything" and it's, "But we're not gay." We're not all gay, most of us are not gay, so I would say probably a majority of people identify as queer. There's a few people who I know who are lesbian or gay or bi or pan, but a lot of people just umbrella-term it, and use queer, and so I think that insistence on rainbows everywhere and "big gay adjective noun,"–big gay is the adjective, and whatever event it is as the noun–it's just sort of not the best. It feels kind of "Pride parade corporate American gayness" which is really not what student communities have been working with or moving towards.

While Sam sees the value in mainstreaming, he hears the criticism, as well. He recalls the anger and disillusionment expressed by a Center user who declined to attend a major LGBTQ+ campus speaker because he "was not happy about the fact that 900 people, 950 people would show up for a drag show but only 10 show up for something else that they felt was more meaningful." This student advocated that existing

253

celebrations of Pride provided simplistic caricatures of LGBT people. "That's all we're reduced to–drag shows for other folks."

Large-scale mainstream efforts hold value for students when they foster feelings and attitudes of inclusion, but they also hold value for students who gain experience unpacking, problematizing and questioning the degree to which mainstreaming hurts or hinders progress around inclusion goals and queer liberation. Whether students are recreating gay culture or countering it in ways that engage critical social justice dialogues, the value of fostering this sort of visibility is felt along multiple trajectories of development.

Supportive Peers and Encouraging Mentors

Beyond simply providing visibility, Centers provide models for identity and engagement, both by exposure to supportive peers with varying experiences of identity and identity development trajectories, and by the introduction of encouraging LGBTQ+ mentors.

Peer models and interactions with peers whose identity experiences are both common and varied in comparison to their own are important to furthering students' own developmental outcomes. Peers provide students with perspective, challenge assumptions, normalize experience and foster resilience. With a level of comfortability in her identity, and expertise in serving the LGBTQ+ community, G often finds herself drawn into interactions with peers, many of them heterosexual and cisgender-identified. "They ask questions about the LGBT community and whenever I talk to them about it, they listen. They want to learn how to be more inclusive," she shared. "It's good to know that they're trying at least, because they do know that they might have someone who's

related to them, or they might encounter someone in the future that might be LGBT identified."

Mary focuses instead on interactions with peers who share some, but not all, of her own identity characteristics. Through informal discussion forums that incorporate social elements and dialogue, she shares with peers her experiences and learns from them about theirs. A number of these identity social-educational cooperatives exist on her campus. "I think there was a trans identity collective…. And then the mono-sexuality, multi-sexuality one is new." She lists off several others, including a few in which interest has diminished and participation tapered. Surprising herself, she exclaims, "I don't know how quickly we add new identity collectives. I didn't know we had that many until I saw a list of them." Because they are informal and require few resources, the campus can be incredibly responsive in using them to create a focus on and support for emerging identities. These sorts of peer-led initiatives help distribute the burden of support that Centers and staff often feel is left entirely to them. Instead, student volunteers share leadership of the group, and are empowered to provide guidance to peers, explained Karla. "Students are really able to kind of [provide general support]" and limited staff knowledge and expertise can be applied to "educating the entire campus, and then when we need to kind of like step into a certain community, if we start noticing things [we can]."

Megan's experience of interaction with peers helped her break down barriers on her own acceptance journey. As lesbian-identified, Megan's long hair served as an important expression of her woman-ness, but also ran counter to a developing affinity for butch and dyke culture. Yet she experienced internal resistance to the shorter hair style

that she also felt drawn to. It was a source of considerable internal dissonance. Referencing a friendship that developed with another Center user that had the short style similar to what she wanted, Megan recalled that their interaction was instrumental in helping her resolve the conflict "It's actually really cool to see her be like that because then I know that I can. It's kind of a role model type thing." She began to notice other people she held in high regard that created additional affirmation and influence that she could be the woman she wanted to be and yet also express her gender in a way that felt natural and right to her. She explained, "There's a girl in here… that has short hair, and so to see her have short hair, it's okay that I have short hair, and then [another friend] too as well."

Carlos was introduced to a faculty member through Center interactions. "I didn't think about trying to become a professor," he acknowledged. "I knew I wanted to do some kind of teaching but since I met [this professor], I'm like, 'This is attainable.'" Carlos didn't see congruence between a teaching role and his identity experience. "Being a Person of Color from my background, teaching and not being a cookie cutter teacher how you usually see. He has his own style so I can have my own style, too." Carlos frequently seeks out opportunities to engage with this faculty member, including taking a number of courses the faculty member has offered, and after successfully proving his classroom efficacy, now working in the research center that houses the faculty member's research agenda. He continues to be encouraged by this contact to resist impulses to limit his potentials.

Active engagement with the Center Director held considerable meaning for Ale, who shared, "She's really great, and she will talk to everyone who comes in here, and

make everyone just feel so instantly comfortable. And I think it's really cool that our supervisor is around and talks to the students, and is very involved with everything." Building and maintaining mentoring relationships between Center staff and students is fundamental for Sheryl, who praises the Center Director on her campus, saying, "he has been able to build relationships all across this campus…. He's been able to be supportive of those students, faculty and staff who are members of the community, who are allies of the community." Referencing the relatively recent establishment of a formal Center presence, and having experienced a lack of support for the LGBTQ+ community in its absence, Sheryl added, "and I find that that's huge given the culture of this campus."

Jordan agreed, suggesting that students "who regularly interact with our services and offices, recognize how important and pivotal we are to their success here." When pressed, he offered a number of theory-based developmental catalysts that casual contact with staff offered to students, some they see and others they don't. Of particular value are the relationships that develop, he continued, "even if they're not completely, fully aware of all the ways in which we do impact them, just the appreciation, and also just having someone who you can talk to."

Char shared her experience with a Center staff member with whom she had grown comfortable. In her most recent relationship, though, her girlfriend was just beginning to come out, with particular trepidation around how her parents might react. Char's experience coming out to parents had been entirely positive. "I don't really know how to do this because I've been out for a really long time and my parents have been really supportive, more or less," she recalled thinking herself, "so what am I supposed to do in this relationship where my girlfriend is terrified of telling her parents?" Char went

257

seeking advice and support from Center staff. "And I think that he gave me some helpful advice and helpful strategies. And then I know that she met with him later and she said he was somewhat helpful." Char underscores that the actual content of the interaction was less important than the mentorship relationship. Successfully receiving support and coaching encouraged her to facilitate contact between her girlfriend and Center staff for the same purpose. Almost as an afterthought, Char concludes the story with a shrug, "I think that was a step on the road to her eventually telling her parents, which she did, and it went okay." She laughs out loud at the anticlimax. "So, sort of a happy ending."

Time and again, participants identified Center staff as mentors and guides. In reference to his Center Director, Craig shared, "He's kind of like a mentor…. I tell [him] a lot of information about my personal life and he gives me his advice and I feel like… we have a good rapport between us." Chelsea gushed, "Oh my gosh, he's the best mentor I could ever ask for!" and Tara explained, "He's older and he's been through everything and he has the resources if I need something, he's there. And he can point me in the right direction. And that's sometimes what you need."

Landon agreed, "I think he is strategically placed to help people, if they need resources and stuff. But we're pretty good friends just in general, so I would ask him as a friend, 'What should I do?' in that regard." Spryte added that sometimes "you just want to get [her] wisdom, you're just like, when she's not busy, you just go, 'I need to say something to you.' And she just listens and then you'll just get the world's best advice from [her]."

"Most times, if I'm having just a really bad day," Kent explained, he stops into the Center and goes from office to office until he finds a staff member present. He shares his

dilemma with "whoever is in their office, just, 'I'm having a bad day, I just need to vent to someone,' and usually they listen and they give really pretty good advice, 99.9% of the time." According to Kent, even mentors can get it wrong .1% of the time, and in those cases, they agree to disagree. Kenny's Center Director "pretty much has an answer for everything, so that's where I go." Faith looks to Center staff to help provide direction and guidance as she applies for prestigious academic opportunities, and as she considered running for an elected position in student government. "I think they're really encouraging," she recalled, "and also they've been really available."

Modeling, Mentorship and the Practice of Collaboration

Centers have a core role in providing for visible structures of support for LGBTQ+ people on campus. However, Centers cannot be solo actors in living out the spirit and letter of policies and statements that promote equal treatment of people and in welcoming diverse perspectives that form and inform the best campus learning environments. Rather, Centers should participate in collaborations that target and support LGBTQ+ students and their needs across the institution. In some of these cases, Center expertise warrants that staff take an informed lead in directing the effort, but in many others, Centers should serve as collaborative partners and allow space for others to contribute leadership. Finally, special consideration is given to collaborations that invigorate the campus intellectual enterprise.

As a new Center staff member, Marcus spent his early days building the relationships with other staff and administrators that would foster collaboration down the road. "That's what I did the entire summer was just set up meetings with folks," he recalled. His position lent him an authority that he had lacked as a student, when, through

observation, he had "learned the importance of making contacts across campus, which is what I think professional staff do. It's what's expected of you and upon these committees and stuff. But as a student, you don't have that." As Marcus points out, Center affiliation conveys an institutional status and a privileged place at the conversational and planning table.

Yet while valuable, administrative rank and Center endorsement only open doors to partnership. "Everything that we do, we are only able to do because we also have these amazing campus partners," shared Eric, who serves as Center staff, "because not every campus does, right? There are some really deep silos in higher ed, and thankfully, we're with some really good collaborative players here."

Fostering a context for successful collaboration is critical, as Marcus and Eric articulate. Building relationships and seeking out partners who have access to resources appropriate to the project, and a willingness to break out of their silos and practice tropes to meet students' needs in ways that are effective, efficient and extraordinary often requires a catalyst. Circumstance can be one such catalyst, and Centers can serve to bring others to planning tables when a situation warrants exploration of a problem-solving response.

Jordan described a collaboration that started with raising awareness about pejorative words and phrases that marginalized LGBTQ+ people. The experience of language-based microaggression was so common, the effort drew interest from colleagues who dealt with identity through additional lenses, and the project evolved into a broader effort to provoke conversation around the power of words and language and involved many campus areas invested in social justice or whose work or research

included language and expression. The group came to the conclusion that the campus

needed to "start really engaging with some of these other larger concepts that even people

who are marginalized are afraid to speak up around," recalled Jordan.

> And really, that's what it's about, it's not about saying necessarily, "This is a
> wrong word or a good word or what have you," because language is fluid, but it's
> about actually engaging and conversating with each other about, "What do we
> mean? Where does that come from?" …And it's also another way of talking about
> socialization and unlearning behaviors, because then it's a perfect way; If you can
> get that, "Oh wow, I don't mean to say 'That's so gay' like as a slur or anything or
> like that, but it's just what I'm used to." Then you can start saying, "Oh yeah and
> I'm just used to the fact of not thinking about Native American genocide," or "I'm
> used to just not thinking about, oh yeah, we're assumed to be heterosexual." You
> can start understanding the idea of scripts, I think, a little bit easier.

The power of this program came from the voices that contributed to its creation because

incredible care was given to the content of each element that problematized a word or

phrase, or that made that case that language created reality and that words had powerful

consequences. With support drawn from many campus areas along with investments in

its success, the program successfully engaged students and others in dialogue about these

common phrases that target and diminish individual people based on identity.

While this effort was initiated and led by Center staff, meaningful collaborations

that further goals of LGBTQ+ inclusion do not always need to originate in Centers, and

often efforts to which Centers contribute, but don't necessarily lead, bring additional

value. This additional value comes in expanded capacity, or the ability of the Center to

further inclusion goals to a greater degree than could otherwise be accomplished.

Cultivating, fostering and encouraging support for LGBTQ+ people from campus areas

or individual people that share a common interest in social justice and inclusion therefore

must be a goal of Center contributions to campus collaborations.

Marcus described a drag show on campus that actually originated with a fraternity and sorority programming council. Despite some consternation about the broad-based appeal—"I remember the unique programs advisor was a little nervous because he just couldn't comprehend that people would actually want to attend a drag show," recalled Marcus—the council moved forward, and "they pitched in and together we brought a couple of queens in…, and we had, I think the whole ballroom, the whole ballroom fits 1,200 and there were just under 1,000 that attended." This included chapter members, general students, LGBTQ+ people and a campus reach that exceeded many programs targeting students more generally. "We had people talking. We still have! People were asking us this year, 'So, are they coming back?'" The initiative both proved that events grounded in LGBTQ+ culture could broadly attract the campus' attention, but it also extended the reach of the Center to hundreds of students who may have only been tangentially aware of its existence.

Similarly, Brett recalled helping to program an event with national personality Laverne Cox, a trans woman spotlighted for her contributions to a popular and critically acclaimed television series. "[It] was great because we had so many different partnerships with people who wanted to be a part of it…. It was pretty much like, 'What could we do to help? We wanna help!'" The Center gladly accepted collaborators from across campus to help co-sponsor the speaker." Brett shared the value of welcoming these partners to join in on an effort that had already been logistically arranged by the Center. "Visibility of other offices who want to be associated with the LGBTQ Center is also really important. It signals to me, and to other LGBTQ students that [our institution] is actually dedicated to our well being, and to our success."

"We're all family now," boasts Carlos, who works in the multicultural center, as

he describes an added benefit of collaboration from his perspective as a representative of

his identity center in partnership with the LGBT Center on a number of projects. "You

hear about the white male dominant force moving the movement, but when you add

people who work in the [Women's Center] and people who work in [Multicultural

Center] and the staff that we have here at the [LGBT Center]." he says, his enthusiasm

for addressing the complexity of identity is palpable. "You get intersections like you

wouldn't believe!" Ale finds similar importance in the ways that her identities are allowed

to converge through her work and participation across centers:

> So, I definitely identify with my ethnicity a lot too, it's very important to me, as
> well as my gender. Being a woman... I'm also an advocate for... I'm a feminist. I'm
> a feminist, I'm sorry, I am for feminism. And a part of working here also, being
> able to see that and facilitating those events with the [Women's Center] is really
> cool, too. So, I'm really; we work a lot together as the centers, so it's really great
> to have everything meshing together.

Important collaborations with community partners are just as critical to the

success of Centers, and the furtherance of goals around LGBTQ+ inclusion. "I think its

an important collaboration that I definitely will continue, because I think the students

here, the queer students here," Jordan emphasizes, as he describes a collaborative of local

institutions of higher education gathered to initiate and encourage contact and sharing

between and among LGBTQ+ students from the various campuses, "really need to

interact with other queer students that are coming from different demographics in

different areas of the country to really get a sense of what does queer mean on a national

scale, not just from their experience here at [this institution]."

Eric describes efforts that expand beyond a focus on the college students his

Center primarily serves. Coming from an institution whose mission is to educate the

entire state, he is often contacted by community groups or organizations to participate in

projects that engage members around sexual orientation, gender identity and associated

topics:

> I just spoke two weeks ago in [a local] high school about gender and gender
> expectations that society has. Again it's basically usually invited topical talks
> based on whatever's requested of us. As long as it is within my comfort
> wheelhouse, and I feel that it is within the mission of the institution and within
> our organization, we can usually put something together. And part of what that
> does, of course, is not only does it expand the touch of [the institution] outside
> into the community, but also is an opportunity for us to share the good work that
> the LGBTQ Center can do. And in many ways, it ultimately can be an opportunity
> for us to recruit.

Collaboration can provide Centers with additional capacity and expanded reach as

they move forward initiatives that foster inclusion for LGBTQ+ people, but arguably the

strongest influence on shifting students' perspectives, values and views is that of faculty.

There is also incredible value in Centers contributing to the process and practice of

teaching and learning on campus. Sheryl discussed the transition of a new Center

Director to her campus. "He already knew to build the relationships with the academic

side of the house…. I like the fact that [Center efforts are] embedded in the learning

experience for students, for all students, and I see that as a huge piece."

Engaging with and partnering with faculty can also model and encourage

individual efforts to follow. Jordan noted that "when it comes to programming and

speakers. And, I certainly feel like there are, not only just connections, but I feel like the

stuff that we do is what I would urge the faculty to do more, like actually facilitating

people's personal understanding of the relation to these ideas and concepts." Capturing

the endorsement of faculty, and working with them to bring intellectuals that converge

around shared interests of social justice and sexual and gender identity also allows

Centers to share the value of successful programming efforts. "I would hope students are

like, 'Oh yeah, that [Center] sponsored that,'" Jordan shared, acknowledging that it's

great when Centers get the credit for big name events and speakers on which so much

time and effort is invested, "but sometimes they just may think, 'Oh, that was just a great

big queer speaker that came.'" Students may simply see the presence of these

personalities as a commitment of the institution, and there is considerable value in that as

an outcome as well.

<p style="text-align:center">Assessment</p>

The third Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that

of Assessment. The following will consider the theme broadly. Center users and Center

staff know that the services and activities that Centers provide create space for some

students to persist who otherwise would not. They ease the burden for a number of other

students who might persist alone despite the obstacles that are encountered on their

campuses. And for others, Centers serve as a safe space where individuals are able to

authentically express themselves in a context of appreciation and acceptance, fostering

identity efficacy and developing critical skill sets.

Yet the bar for assessment is rising across operational units at institutions as their

stakeholders demand evidence regarding claims made about institutional outcomes and

the value of higher education. Sheryl argues that if "you tie yourself into what we say

we're about [which is] preparing tomorrow's leaders, [then] your work cannot simply be

outfits, food and fun." Sheryl's last phrase characterizes a critique of identity centers and

experiential-based cultural programming–that it favors flash over substance, and little

lasting development is to be gained from mere exposure to superficial cultural difference. Rather, she posits, "it's gotta be grounded in some other places." And besides recording opportunities provided for students to take part in these sorts of visible cultural celebrations, or adding up the numbers of them that do, she continues, "you've gotta be able to demonstrate–with the tools that you have in terms of evaluation and assessment–you've gotta be able to demonstrate that you're making a difference and you've gotta be able to be willing to go do battle, because sometimes it takes that."

Jordan concurred, noting that his Center conducts analysis and contributes data essential to understanding how the Center contributes to students' educational experience. "We have student learning principles that the college has put together as part of their accreditation process." Along with data collected from other support services and faculty departments, the university is creating a data story that describes how the institution delivers the educational value that the curriculum and co-curriculum promise.

To contribute effectively to these institution-wide efforts, Centers and Center staff must have expertise in the tools of assessment. But to embody best practice and to tell their own data stories, they must also engage in quantitative and qualitative analysis of services and activities that provide evidence of their value. Triangulation demands that Centers engage beyond their own borders, conducting studies of climate and culture to determine the pace of change and progress, and to develop strategic priorities. Yet similar thoughtful analysis of Center offerings to determine how to best position and utilize available resources for maximum effect is equally critical.

Jordan described conducting a survey assessment among students to determine the effectiveness of a poster campaign around the power of language. The return rate neared

40%, which far exceeds the average for online surveys. He shared just how surprised they were by the response. "It was really big, we were really surprised. Which also showed how people really engaged with this project, both for good and for bad." The rich survey data affirmed that the posters were sparking strong reactions and conversations among students. And survey responses were filled with a mix of strong sentiments both affirming and critiquing the campaign's messages. "But then that's also how we chose the direction for this year's set of posters," Jordan recalls, as the planning committee used the data collected to make changes that enhanced the program in its second cycle of implementation.

Michel suggested that assessment practice and expertise is an essential activity, but one that could benefit from additional support and development among Center staff. Michel noted that designing the right tool to collect the right data to make meaning is possibly more challenging for identity centers, because of the abstract nature of the work and the potential for delayed manifestation of its positive impact. Development, as a human process, does not immediately reflect results that are easily quantifiable. Collecting and making meaning of qualitative, experience-based data is time-consuming and its conclusions are sometimes challenged on bases of subjectivity, breadth of sampling, or practices of analysis. While he remains optimistic, and doesn't quite resort to describing current efforts as some sort of muddling along, he is quick to acknowledge that best practices have yet to be developed, and that while practitioners continue to seek those answers presently, "we've been able to so far come up with assessment pieces to prove what we're doing that folks seem to be okay with."

Developing LGBTQ+ Community and Counterspace

The fourth Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that of developing LGBTQ+ community and counterspace, and six sub-themes became evident: Centers as physical spaces and counterspaces; expression and authenticity; developing community and sharing common experiences; fostering resilience; affiliation and action; and providing additional general support. The following will consider the theme broadly and then differentiate and discuss each sub-theme. The literature contains considerable support for the value of campus spaces where students feel supported and welcomed, and in which they find belonging (Case & Hunter, 2012; Grier-Reed, 2010; Huber & Cueva, 2012; Nunez, 2011; Revilla, 2010; Schlossberg, 1989; Schwartz, 2014; Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). Most students will seek and find these spaces broadly on campus with others who share majority identity characteristics. However marginalized students, particularly those with underrepresented sexual orientation and gender identities, may struggle to find supportive others. In part, this may be due to the fact that one's sexual orientation and gender identity are not always visible identity characteristics, such as those associated with race. To further problematize the context, students who are more open about a marginalized sexual orientation or gender identity, experience intolerance and harassment with greater frequency than closeted peers (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Rankin, 2003). As a Center staff member who observes how students navigate the campus, Arica reported that she "wouldn't necessarily say it's hostile, but I wouldn't be fully comfortable saying that it's welcoming. So, I think most of the students, while they don't go out of their way to hide, like I said, I think they don't disclose."

268

Jordan shared that "it can be difficult in trying to provide space for people to find solidarity and a sense of comfort" on campus, and posited that campus culture and subculture creates multiple concurrent iterations of campus environment that students may or may not encounter or experience based on physical and social spheres of influence and engagement. "Depending on which aspect of the culture that you interact with the most, or which spaces that you find yourself inhabiting, it can either be super inclusive or sometimes very, very isolating."

LGBT Centers exist to provide and encourage a campus culture of support and inclusion, and a space where students feel as if they belong and matter. "There's no really other space that they consider a safe space and feel comfortable," argued Arica, referring to the Center that is the focus of her work life. As fundamental aspects of Center support, Eric indicated that when a student steps through the door of the Center, they "know that they're going to find staff there, they know that they're going to find peer support as well, and that's a big part of community development." Eric underscores that merely finding community is an essential outcome in itself, and that students who are unable to find campus spaces where they can be themselves tend to suffer. Others whose identity or expression are deemed non-normative may experience intolerance, harassment and violence that diminishes academic and social outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Reason, Terenzini & Domingo, 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2006). Underscoring the importance of this campus presence, Eric continued, "and so, generally speaking, if a student shows up, there's going to be other people there, and so they will find some layer of support and community in our LGBTQ Center."

Reinforcing Arica and Eric's claims was Chelsea, a student who spends

269

considerable time in the Center on her campus. She had a less theoretical approach

grounded in her lived experience, but no less reflective of how students experience both

campuses and Centers when she said, "I'm not familiar enough with the mission

statement, but I do know it says something about creating a safe space, and I feel safe

there."

Michel beautifully articulated the over-arching purpose of LGBT Centers as

promoting the inclusion of LGBTQ+ people, but also broadly interested in seeking out

and meeting the needs of all campus constituencies:

> This space is for LGBTQ individuals, because we need to make sure that we have a space for those folks to come to convene, to discuss, talk about issues that relate to them, whatever aspect of their identity. But, I also say that everybody has a sexual orientation or identity. Everybody has a gender identity. Just because you're heterosexual doesn't mean you can't see the world through queer lenses, or whatever. So the space is for everyone, and even if you're not... You've had zero experience with the queer community, but you wanna learn. This is the space for those folks too.

To that end, Sheryl recalled the day the LGBT Center on her campus opened.

"People were in the hallways. It was packed," she recalled. As spaces that serve all

students, as units that provide broad outreach and education, and as places that foster and

further community on campus, Sheryl knows the essential value and necessity of

providing identity centers on campus. "I knew the day that we opened the Center that it

was already over capacity," she says with a sly smile.

As posited, one of the most fundamental and essential values that Centers provide

is the creation of LGBTQ+ community and physical counterspace that supports students

with underrepresented sexual orientations and gender identities. The following analysis

provides evidence of the ways in which these physical counterspaces are imperative for

270

LGBTQ+ students. As locations where students feel comfortable to express themselves authentically, they also serve to facilitate community as students discuss and share common experiences associated with their lives as students and as LGBTQ+ people. Further, in LGBTQ+ safe space, students help facilitate the development of resilience strategies within themselves and others, and serve to develop and support associations that coalesce around shared identity understandings and that foster affiliation and action. Finally, Centers provide general essential support to LGBTQ+ student users, and serve as a bridge to resources that encourage persistence.

Centers as Physical Spaces and Counterspaces

Most physical spaces on campus reflect heteronormative cultural norms and expectations, leaving students with underrepresented sexual orientations and gender identities constantly guarding against microaggressions, emotional abuse and the threat or experience of violence (Vaccaro, 2012). The added stress of navigating these hostile campus environments is considerably draining for LGBTQ+ people. LGBT Centers provide a physical space, or counterspace, free of the hostility and identity resistance endemic to other spaces.

As discussed previously, counterspaces serve as gathering places for people at the margins who often come together for mutual comfort and support. Members engage in sharing of common experiences and in validating one another's experience of oppression. This can serve to buffer the impact of microaggressions, and foster the development of individual and collective strategies that bolster resistance and resilience. Ultimately these counterspaces, constituted as formal or informal associations—for instance, class- or major-related groups, student organizations or institutional structures such as culture

271

centers or ethnic studies curricula—serve as "an important strategy for minority students' academic survival" (Solorzano et al., 2000, p. 71) and institutional persistence (Case & Hunter, 2012; Grier-Reed, 2010; Huber & Cueva, 2012; Nunez, 2011; Revilla, 2010; Schwartz, 2014; Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso & Lopez, 2010).

Renn's (2011) work notes that the high level cognitive work of learning is best accomplished in the context of social affirmation and acceptance. Students whose existence is characterized by outsiderness and a lack of belonging or feeling understood, are less likely to meet and exceed their academic potential. Where majority students have a better time of fitting into a campus structured to support them, underrepresented students seek supportive counterspace and refuge from daily experiences of microaggressions. Culture centers serve a critical and meaningful role as spaces of social sanctuary. "Identity centers create buffers against microaggressions and other negative aspects of campus climate. They form counterspaces for and by students who share identities" (Renn, 2011).

Research participants vividly described how they experience their Centers, how they interact with them, and see them utilized by peers. "As you know I basically live here," shared Andi, laughing, his countenance simply beaming. "I come here between classes, I come here after classes. I mean I'm here throughout all the afternoon most of the time." As Spryte talked about their experience with the Center, one could observe the tension releasing from their body. "It's just nice to go in there. It's like going into your living room, like okay your house, and just sitting there on the floor," they shared. "Any day you go in there, someone is sleeping on the couch, or drawing on the white board, someone's watching a movie, music's playing." Kent agreed:

272

It's a multi-faceted place. It's a place where you can go and just hang out, watch a movie, eat your lunch, which I do every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, just chill out and have a good time. And it's also a place where you can go if you're having a real problem that you need help with. I mean that's what [the staff] are there for. So, I mean just to come in and be like, "Okay, I just came out of this class, I'm aggravated, I just wanna sit down and take a nap." You can do that. You can just sit there and have a good time.

Kent's assessment was consistent with Brett's, who as Center staff, has the chance to observe student use patterns. "We have students who come in every day, five days a week for a couple of hours a day, just to be…" He paused a moment to gather his thoughts before he continued, "they might not talk to you, they might just want to hang out, they might be checking out resources, but they come back consistently and I think that demonstrates that it's obviously a place they prefer to be."

"You know, we're dealing with issues that are literally life or death," pointed out Arica. In a national study of campus climate for LGBTQ+ people, harassment was experienced by over one third of LGBTQ+ respondents, while twenty percent feared for their physical safety. Over half of LGBTQ+ respondents remained closeted to avoid intimidation. Experiences of violence by LGBTQ+ people were often followed by depression and anxiety, anger, chronic stress, feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem and internalized homophobia, and ongoing fear for one's safety, along with a heightened sense of vulnerability (Rankin, 2003). Arica continued, "So, why wouldn't people who identify as belonging to this community need a space, where they can talk, and be themselves, and be comfortable?" She asks the question, and, shrugging her shoulders, she leaves unarticulated the natural conclusion. Of course colleges and universities, cognizant of their own campus climates and the negative outcomes for LGBTQ+ people that accompany them, should be responsible for providing and fostering these critical

273

campus counterspaces.

Expression and Authenticity

Schlossberg (1989) explores concepts of marginality and mattering, and the degree to which individuals who feel that they are accepted or belong are more likely to achieve positive educational outcomes. Indeed, mattering is associated with feeling attended to, and being appreciated and important in the lives and experiences of other people. Yet students with marginalized sexual orientations or gender identities may receive, find or seek acceptance through presumption of heterosexuality, by remaining closeted, or otherwise concealing these critical identity characteristics that set them apart from majority peers. Thus, particularly for students who are marginalized based on sexual orientation or gender identity, it is important that experiences of mattering be grounded in an authentic self expression. Students need to find unequivocal acceptance and belonging as gays, as lesbians, as bisexuals, as trans people, or as they embody the variety of identities that fall within the LGBTQ+ framework. LGBT Centers serve as campus locations where students can be themselves.

Sam shared that, "these spaces that we interact with everywhere are not inclusive of me. So, it's important for me as a student to feel like I have a space where I can go and be me." Skye described that while reserved on campus, "I'm pretty much like shooting glitter in there," referring to the Center on her campus. Andi agreed, noting that "when I'm with people who understand me... like here at the Center, or if I'm with people that I hang out with around the Center, people that aren't heteronormative. I can definitely be myself a lot more." He paused before emphasizing, "I mostly come here to hang out and be around people that I can be me around."

274

Veronica spends time in the Center because, "I know that's a place where I can just let my guard down, relax, don't worry about other stuff," while Felicia expressed that "I don't come to the Center often anymore because I'm a bit busy, but I know when I go to the Center, I'm just like... I can totally be myself, I can act whatever way I want." Felicia went on further to talk about the social pressure that she feels as a trans woman to constantly perform femininity. Yet in the Center, the pressure was reduced. "I can definitely act more like myself, like lower my voice and feel a little better and everything."

Skye, who is half of a non-gender confirming trans/queer couple, shared her perception of emotional and physical safety. "I generally feel more comfortable when my partner and I are together, or we're with more queer people. I also, I just generally also feel more comfortable when I'm around other marginalized populations." Considering her feelings, she qualified, "I don't know if that's an accurate perception to have but I sometimes feel like I can connect more with people from various marginalized populations."

For Skye, as for many of the research participants, authentic expression of identity is both personal and communal. Climate and context strongly influence one's ability to express oneself authentically and openly, and while Centers often provide opportunities for students to be accepted, they do so by providing contact with and facilitating interaction between open-minded and like-minded others.

Developing Community and Sharing Common Experiences

As explored in Chapter 2, the inability to relate authentically with others and truly embody one's self may curtail important development trajectories, such as those posited

275

by Chickering (Skipper, 2005), Magolda (2004) and Schlossberg (1989). Seeking

interdependence and a healthy reliance on others for support, as Chickering's Moving

Through Autonomy Toward Interdependence vector requires, essentializes fully mutual,

trusting relationships that might exceed the reach of students who are unable or unwilling

to risk coming out and identity self-disclosure. Additionally, the development of a

coherent self-concept consistent with the Establishing Identity vector might escape

students for whom majority identity tropes obscure alternate identity potentials (Skipper,

2005).

Schlossberg (1989) describes mattering as being associated with belonging and

being welcomed into a social community. Mattering is being appreciated and important

in the lives and experiences of other people. In the college context, students who feel they

matter are more likely to be retained and succeed on campus, thus it becomes imperative

that students find a cohort of accepting peers with whom these mattering relationships

might be cultivated. Trevor describes the difficulty that confronts LGBTQ+ people in this

endeavor:

> I think it's difficult. I think it's difficult for students to feel welcome in many
> university campuses, or at least the one that I've been on, but especially so for
> LGBTQ folks. I think because we have kind of a small community, it's difficult
> for people to find and to get plugged in with the [LGBTQ+] community…. We
> have, from my experience, a pretty small LGBTQ-identified community. So I
> think it's difficult for some people to even find other people who might identify
> anywhere in the queer alphabet. But I think that on a micro level, that people find
> the community and do have a good experience and feel that the climate is good in
> the micro sense.

For Trevor, finding acceptance and affirmation starts with the identification of others

who share common identities and identity experiences. This was definitely true for Craig,

who described developing "a sense of belonging. My best friends also happen to be

276

LGBTQ here at [my institution], and so just that kind of sense of family, those have been my really positive experiences. Nothing really quite tangible, but definitely important."

Chelsea acknowledged that she "struggled a lot in my freshman year. I wanted to go home, I didn't want to be here." Presumed to be heterosexual, Chelsea had not really explored what she was coming to identify as her bisexuality, and found her social circle comprised of other heterosexuals. She described feeling like she wasn't being honest with herself and others. She had a distant awareness of the campus LGBTQ+ population, and a curiosity to learn more about her own identity. "Okay, let me push myself out of my comfort zone. I'll go to one of these Alliance meetings. Everybody will think I'm gay. Whatever, I kind of am," she remembers herself thinking and the memory makes her laugh out loud. "Yeah, so I go. Everybody was so welcoming, and it just was one of those moments where I really felt a connection there." It is apparent that this recollection is a very affirming one for Chelsea. "Then I started coming to the Center. And I come to the Center every day now. I feel like the Center, with [the staff], and the people that go there, they're kind of my family here at [my institution]."

Both Craig and Chelsea describe the Center and its users in terms of family and its relationship hallmarks of unconditional welcome and unequivocal acceptance. It represents these student's awareness of how they want to experience connectedness to others and to be experienced in return that is consistent with Magolda's (2004) concept of self-authorship. As an outcome of self-authorship, students develop an inner voice to make sense of their lives and experiences as they answer three important questions including: "Who am I?" and "How do I want to construct relationships with others?" When students are forced to compromise or deny their identities, and engage in

277

inauthentic experiences with others, the hallmark inner voice that develops to guide meaning-making is diminished, distorted and impaired.

For other students, developing close relationships with accepting peers was important to their own ability to grow and flourish. Andi described her friends in the Center as "people who understand me" and "really accepting and really open." She contrasted this with another friend group whose members are "just not familiar with queer people." Andi shared, "I've become more open due to being around open people, and I like being about in the open." She appreciates being around people who encourage and appreciate her developing trans identity. But she also appreciates her previous friend groups and relationships even as she finds them limiting. She explained, "with my group of friends who are straight acquaintances, for the most part, males and females, I have to be a little bit more reserved around them," she explained before adding, "they don't understand people are different."

For Felicia, too, her Center interaction "helped me meet a lot of people who I don't wanna say are 'like me,' but people who have similar attributes and who can relate, I guess is what I'm trying to get across." Landon was mindful of both the potentials and pitfalls involved in drawing many or most of his close campus relationships from a single pool:

> It's a very reaffirming kind of space to be in. It does help you find like minded individuals to where you can create your own social net, I guess. I don't know. It probably isn't a good thing that it helps you self-segregate yourself, because I know that that's its own little problem. But it's very useful when you're new to the area, and you don't know anyone else, right? So you have something in common with someone else.

Landon's identity as a gay man offers him numerous opportunities to engage with

similarly-identified campus peers. An initial identity affinity can be refined and deepened by other shared interests and common experiences. As an asexual student, Spryte's experience of seeking similarly-identified peers was vastly different. "I actually ended up meeting four or five other aces. And we were like, 'Yay! We have people!' We can meet in the Center and actually talk about being asexual." Ever the educator, Spryte applied their scientific reasoning to explain "because it's like one in 10,000 or whatever. So it's like, I'm not surprised that there are five [aces] on campus because there's like 50,000 [students on campus]. So one in 10,000."

When students are free of the pressures associated with chilly, hostile or unwelcoming climates, they are able to more successfully integrate into the campus community (Rankin, 2003), and achieve success outcomes academically and interpersonally (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Reason, Terenzini & Domingo, 2006; Unbach & Kuh, 2006). Being warmly welcomed, encouraged and celebrated creates space for students to succeed on campus and in the classroom.

As a student worker in her Center, Ale takes this imperative to heart as she interacts with students, particularly those who are new to the Center or coming in for the first time:

> I love the job that I have. I feel like the [LGBT] Center here is the place that, I really feel impacts students. I think students come in here and they feel really welcomed because everyone is... It's nice, and everyone greets you. And that's something that they told from the beginning. To be nice to everyone, and I am, because I wanna have that same impact, if somebody comes in and they're feeling that they don't have a place and they could maybe find it here, I wanna immediately show them that there is a place available for them. And I think the Center does that very well.

It is her experience being welcomed and affirmed through her own Center interactions

that drives her passion for her job, and fuels her belief that Centers are indispensable supports for students. Jade expresses a similar sentiment. "I wanna be able to see people who have my identities and are part of my communities and just celebrate and be together. Like in communion."

Fostering Resilience

Even as students tentatively come out to friends, peers and others on campus, they may remain silent within biological family units about their sexual orientation or gender identity. This is because an unfortunate common experience of LGBTQ+ people is to temporarily or permanently lose the support of loved ones, particularly family members, when a marginalized sexual orientation or gender identity is revealed or discovered. To buffer against this potential for loss in relationships and support, and to create structures of unconditional love and support that might not be reflected through existing family values, LGBTQ+ people often refer to creating strong networks within and among others who share identity as choosing or developing one's family, and Eric points out that college is often "the first time that they are finding that idea of that non-biological family that we often talk about and making those connections across identity."

As well, unlike with other marginalized identity characteristics such as race or faith, sexual orientation and gender identity are often characteristics that are not shared within and among family members. Whereas in cases where family members share identity characteristics, and common resilience strategies might be naturally conveyed as a part of socialization practices, LGBTQ+ people must seek and find others who share identity characteristics from whom they can learn these important lessons for how to best navigate environments that resist them. LGBT Centers can serve as gathering spaces and

collectives where LGBTQ+ people can find one another and develop critical associations that further identity development, personal growth and social acceptance.

For Andi, an important strategy for resisting microaggressions is to simply seek spaces that are free of them. "The Center helps me relieve the whole microaggression-like society we have basically when it comes to trans people and sometimes gay people. Just by being in an area where that doesn't happen." As a person who is regularly misgendered, Andi is mindful of the power of words and language. "Just being around people in general, who are aware of the fact that you shouldn't tell someone to 'Man up,' or you shouldn't just call every woman you know a 'Bro'" is an important consideration in how she crafts an environment that supports her identity.

Trevor spoke of the affirmation received through "sometimes commiseration, sometimes celebration, sometimes just sharing" about identity and experiences. Char's description of "just being able to talk to other people who I felt like had similar experiences, and I was able to relate to and being able to share my own experiences and be heard and have other people get frustrated," was similar. In the way that both of these students describe interacting, an individual struggle is, through sharing, determined to be a more universal, identity-based experience. In Brett's words, "this is a space in which we can talk about what is offensive, and be okay with it. So for me, personally, it's a nice escape to just be around people who get it on some level."

Mary uses the Center as a space to discuss obstacles. "We talk a lot about dealing with our families, the difference between being at home and being here and stuff like that. And other things, too," she stressed, "but that, I think, is the thing where most people have expressed stress" She found significant value in "very intentionally

281

discussing our problems and how others have coped with it and things like that,"

describing the process of sharing as having "been really, really useful." Andi, too, uses

these conversations to consider alternative responses, or explore in advance how she

might respond if she found herself confronted with something similar. "Just being around

a group of people that have been in similar situations as you, just listening to normal

conversations you can get, you will, you can absorb like how you should handle things."

Brett notes that as students begin to share their frustrating experiences, others are

often drawn into those conversations and discussions can get quite animated. He agrees

that interaction grounded in gaining personal efficacy is the key to developing strategies

that resist microaggressions:

> And so I think that indicates that they're finding something useful out of the space
> and a place that's probably freer from microaggressions. I feel that there's a space
> that is freer from microaggressions and also a place that's safer to talk about
> microaggressions. I think that's important, an important thing and it's also a good
> place for students to practice dealing with microaggressions, because we make it
> very clear that you're allowed to address things respectfully with people. Whereas,
> if students have never done that before and they're interacting with the service
> provider on campus and that service provider says something, they may not know
> how to respond other than just take it and move on, and let it pile on. So I feel like
> the Center educates people how to deal effectively with microaggressions.

Affiliation and Action

In addition to developing community with others who share key identity

characteristics and experiences or developing strategies to resist the impact of

microaggressions, connectedness can be fostered through shared purpose, affiliation and

action. Student clubs and organizations often coalesce in these ways, and participants

identified that this involvement can foster leadership efficacy and promote social action

and change.

Mary described, "When I was first kind of coming to terms with, 'I might be queer,' [the LGBT club] was a good place" to connect with supportive others. Now most of her sphere of interaction is comprised of an LGBTQ+ cohort. She affirmed, "most of my friends I've met through queer groups, so I guess it seems like there's more than there probably actually are on campus based on who I hang out with." Lindsey leads a small identity-themed group on her campus. Describing its purpose, she shared, "We don't put on events. We have a tiny bit of funding to provide food or a movie for the group every once in a while. But for the most part, it's just like intentional conversation, intentional community."

Craig got involved in his LGBT club for similar reasons—seeking community—but then "I started to get involved and going to those weekly meetings, and the parties, and just different functions and events that they would have. Eventually I ended up holding a position on the board. I was Activism chair." For Craig, the social activity of club membership turned into leadership activity and then social activism. Now as a club leader, he sees as a primary function for his group and others like it on the campus as "really important to kinda foster that open environment" such that "you could go to any of those [groups] and talk to kids who are going through kinda the little same experiences."

Hector's interactions with his LGBT club have led to an exploration of culture through the lens of identity. "Besides having lunch together and conversations, we've gone out to plays, to watch plays because the [city] community's very rich in the art scene, and most of the plays we've watched have been thematically oriented toward LGBTQ issues. And then we've had discussions about what we've seen and how whether

283

that relates. Those stories we've seen relate to ours."

Campus LGBT clubs can serve as an extension of the counterspace provided by Centers. As Chelsea describes, "I feel like we're all just really positive people–body positive, sex positive, sexual orientation–It's just really open and accepting. So I feel like with the majority of the people that go there, I can be my authentic self." Likewise, Spryte conveyed that there is power in gathering a collective, sometimes quite literally experienced as strength in numbers. "It's also anytime I'm with anybody in [the LGBT club], for example. Anybody within my organization, I feel. Even if we're out in public or maybe if I'm in that faculty advisor's office, or whatever," said Spryte describing when they felt most comfortable on campus, or able to express themselves authentically. "But if I'm with somebody from the [LGBT club], I feel like I don't have to continue acting because I.... two man army, I guess," and they laugh at the image this evokes in their mind before continuing, "as long as it's just not me."

Providing Additional General Support

Aside from creating physical and metaphorical counterspaces that support and encourage students in understanding and developing their identities, Centers also provide additional general support in a number of ways explored by participants. Chelsea described a mentor relationship that has developed as she has worked with the Center Director. "He's the best mentor I could ask for," she gushed, and Craig described having a "good rapport" with his Center Director and thinking of that person as "kind of like a mentor." Similarly, Faith felt encouraged when she received a recommendation submitted by staff for participation in a competitive scholars program, and when she explored the possibility of running for an elected office on campus.

For Tara, support was felt when Center staff encouraged her to report a classroom microaggression as a bias incident. When confronted by something a professor said in class that "didn't feel right, the way he said it," Center staff encouraged Tara to self-advocate as they told her, "You can report that. And that's how we get things stopped at this campus." Her experience of reporting the incident helped her feel empowered, but also confirmed that the Center is a place to go when she needs answers to questions or confronts challenges on campus.

Other students looked to the Center and its staff to answer general questions and have a broad knowledge of the university and how it functions. Kenny indicated that his Center Director "pretty much has an answer for everything" and serves as a go-to person for many or most of the challenges that Kenny encounters, whether or not those challenges are identity-related. Tara described how the Center can serve as a bridge to other supportive campus and community resources. "He's older and he's been through everything and he has the resources if I need something," she said, describing her Center Director, "and he can point me in the right direction. And that's sometimes what you need."

Spryte took advantage of Center staff to share her frustrations: "Sometimes if you just want somebody to rant to, and you just want to get [M] wisdom, you're just like, when she's not busy, you just go, '[M], I need to say something to you.'" Spryte gives several examples of problems she has shared and resolved through these interactions. Just one is related to sexual identity, and then only tangentially. "She just listens, and then you'll just get the world's best advice from [M]."

Yet identity expertise and guidance is a critical component of the general support

students receive through Center involvement. Jade related her experience with a man who received Center support through contact with Staff. "I was sensing from my interaction was that he was kind of struggling with his identity, in being open about his identity, or figuring out his identity." This identity confusion was causing considerable distress, and the man was using alcohol and other drugs to self-medicate and cope. Center staff had to be sensitive to both the identity distress, but also the potential for harm accompanied by the substance use and abuse. It required a very careful balance of "trying to get them to talk to you without pushing them too much."

Megan described a time when "a girl came in and she just didn't really know. She wasn't really sure what her gender identity was." Conversation followed between Megan, the Center user and another person. Megan continued, "Me and another girl were just kind of explaining the different ways that.… The different definitions and terms that there are. And we kind of talked through with her and she shared some of her feelings." The student returned after that conversation and continued to think about and explore her identity and has grown comfortable as a Center user. "It's just really cool to know that people can come here and ask questions and get answers and not feel like they're being pressured or that we're looking for a specific answer or anything like that."

Veronica came at a similar experience from the other side, as she shared that being in the Center means "I get to see how other people navigated that identity. And it actually helped me figure out my own identity, or at least how to figure out more about it. And yeah, they are very supportive people." Eric affirmed his role as supportive, but limited by education and practice. "We are not a counseling center, we're very clear about that. We're a resource and referral center, but we have a great relationship with our

counseling spaces on campus…. But we do offer support and advice as students need it."

As it relates to developing LGBTQ+ community and creating supportive counterspace on campus, Centers help students to express themselves authentically, serve to facilitate community as students discuss and share common experiences associated with their lives as students and as LGBTQ+ people, and help facilitate the development of resilience strategies. Further, Centers support associations that coalesce around shared identity understandings and that foster affiliation and action, and provide general support to LGBTQ+ student users that help them overcome institutional and organizational obstacles to their success.

Specialized Expertise

The sixth Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that of specialized expertise, and three sub-themes became evident: Theory expertise; practice expertise; and fostering identity development. The following will consider the theme broadly and then differentiate and discuss each sub-theme. The work of student development has always been focused on attending to the needs of students as whole people, addressing their individual complexity, as well as their needs in context. As institutions have grown, and the scale and scope of identity development has become better understood across domains of identity and experience, efforts to address the specific needs of individual students has required greater degrees of knowledge specialization among the staff charged with supporting them.

Different university personnel have been identified to reach out to students who experience cultural and institutional marginalization in different ways: from those grounded in identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity; to the

support of students with differences in ability or who need accommodations for full curricular and co-curricular inclusion; to student cohorts with diminished outcomes, such as athletes who persist at greater rates when supported by staff who understand their unique student experiences, challenges, and personal, professional and performance goals. The staff charged with this outreach receive training, and engage in experiences that hone a critical support skill set attenuated to student needs in a particular area. They become defacto content experts in the support of a particular cohort of students, although their skills aren't limited to the support of those students, and staff show a considerable transferability among and between support roles, as well as the capacity to advance and show leadership within and external to their current roles.

Foremost, staff are expected – particularly in times of distress or in response to specific acts of social or institutional intolerance – to show expertise around LGBTQ+ identity development, social justice awareness and intersectionality.

Theory Expertise

A considerable body of research has been assembled to describe how individuals come to understand general patterns of human development, particularly during life periods congruent with collegiate experiences, as well as development of personal identity related to any number of unique or cohort-based characteristics, such as race, gender, faith, ability and sexual orientation and gender identity, among others. Chapter two's literature review thoroughly describes the breadth and depth of scholarship developed around theoretical understandings of college student development, and most specifically sexual orientation and gender identity development.

It is critical that Center staff make use of these theories to guide practice

effectively, as they seek to meet the needs of the diverse students who seek assistance and support through Center interactions. Further, ongoing work with students reveals new and necessary pathways for growing theory-to-practice refinement consistent with identity marginalizations that are just coming to light—as more recent efforts to better address the needs of transgender students, asexual students, or those who occupy the reframed space of middle sexualities.

Beyond the use of identity theory in direct service to students, programming, outreach, and planning efforts, Center staff must also position their work in the context of related social justice movements. Finally, to effectively meet the needs of students, the work of Centers must reflect and honor the intersectionalities embodied by their constituents.

Identity theory. Cultivating a broad and responsive awareness of developmental trajectories for sexual orientation and gender identities is fundamental to providing the best possible direct services and supports to students, as well as providing forward-thinking, strategic advocacy. The latter, in particular, is critical because emerging or newly recognized marginalized sexual and gender identities are often characterized by erasure. They are invisible because the culture of a place may not openly recognize, support or welcome these newer identity cohorts. Centers and Center Staff must be vigilant in their efforts to bring forward and draw attention to emerging identities even as theoretical understandings of them are developed, tested and adapted.

As a staff member within his Center, Brett spoke emotionally of his observations of student development, "I've seen first year students turn into second year students, and watching their identities develop over time. And so I've learned about that process."

Pausing for a moment of reflection, he posited the context of identity development as a paradox. "I'm fascinated by this idea that yes they're 18 and they're legally considered adults, but their identities are still developing, they're still kids in a lot of ways." Providing a stable, dependable and safe foundation of support becomes, in his eyes, a critical function of Centers, not just for students institutional persistence, but for their success after college. "LGBT Centers have a major, major role in helping [students'] identities develop, because it directs them not only towards things that they should be learning, but seeing themselves professionally."

Trevor also placed considerable emphasis on the Center role of intentionally fostering safe spaces that facilitate personal identity exploration and development. This might lead to discussions with Center users, affiliated student organizations, and ally program members to discuss, frequently and often in detail, "the nuances of how a space could be safe maybe for gay, lesbian, bisexual or other sexual minorities and not necessarily a safe space for trans and genderqueer folks and people outside of the gender binary."

Conveying broadly this developing knowledge around sexual and gender identity is important. Ale talked about her transition from a high school GSA to her collegiate involvement with the LGBT Center and LGBT-serving student organizations as characterized by rapid growth. "Immediately when I came in, everyone was so smart and they were saying all these terms that I wasn't so … familiar with. And I was like, "Oh my God!" She found herself interacting with a range of people representing experiences and identities that were new to her, as well as using "many terms that I hadn't even heard of." As she reflected on this period, she paused for a moment before clarifying her experience,

"not necessarily heard of, but I didn't exactly know what they were." The difference between hearing about a term or identity and meeting someone who embodies it and interacting with them created a different standard of understanding and empathy.

Mary, similarly, noted the rapid emergence of new and growing identities: "I mean, there's two new queer [identity cohorts] this year alone," she explained, referring to student organizations that seek to connect and serve students with a particular shared identity. Indicating both the re-emergence of a group intended to serve transgender students and an additional group whose focus is multi-sexual identity, she took a breath and sighed, a smile emerging. "I don't know how quickly we add new [organizations]. I didn't know we had that many until I saw a list of them in the [Center]." The responsibility for helping students connect with one another and resources is a critical Center function, and the rapid pace of change means constant professional development for Center personnel around identity development theory.

Identity expertise is put to use in any number of contexts, formal and informal. Of course, active education of campus constituents takes place through a variety of opportunities. But the information is conveyed informally, as well. G spoke of a peer who knew of her student employment position in the Center. The two of them connected before a shared class and engaged in a related conversation as the peer asked G a question in the presence of other students arriving in the classroom. G explained further:

> She came up to me and asked me, "There's someone in one of my classes who dresses like a boy, but then later on dresses like a girl," and she had a hard time with the pronouns. And I told her, "If you don't know exactly what their pronoun is, just say 'them', just say 'they', just because you don't know what they identify yet," and I said, "Honestly, just go ask. They're not going to get offended if you ask. I would encourage that." And there [were] about six or seven people in the room at that time, when I was just saying that. I know that it was pretty quiet, so I

291

know that they were listening and I can tell that they were listening.

In this informal interaction, G was able to educate not just the friend with the question, but a number of additional peers. She provided basic information about identity, as well as language prompts that casual users might employ in this sort of situation.

Trevor articulated an additional area in which theoretical fluency is essential for Center staff, when he said, "I've learned a lot about coming out, in the many, many ways that people come out or don't come out or continually come out all the time." The act of coming out is very closely aligned with marginalized sexual and gender identities, in a way that sets them apart in significant ways from other identities which may be visibly evident or otherwise apparent. Additionally, coming out is an ongoing process that LGBTQ+ people must constantly enact through their lived experiences, and may or may not serve as an obstacle or challenge depending on any number of contextual variables. Center staff need to understand theories that gird coming out experiences, and how to help students in need explore options, opportunities and costs related to being and coming out.

Social justice awareness. Beyond an extensive and nuanced understanding of theories that directly apply to the development of identity related to sexual orientation and gender identity, Center staff must also know the social justice movements from which those theories have grown, and to which they remain inextricably interconnected. Because power in society is manifest through cultural disparities grounded in institutional systems that convey privilege to some and deny it to others, it is impossible to talk about making social progress around sexual orientation and gender identity equality without also talking about diminishing social prejudice and disparity grounded in race, gender,

faith or other immutable characteristics. Yet majority actors need to both learn and cultivate awareness of social justice and privilege, and unlearn behaviors that reinscribe existing power dynamics across domains of intolerance. Giving voice to related struggles honors intersectionality work, which will be discussed in the next section, but also furthers the goals of LGBTQ+ liberation.

Within the LGBTQ+ community, members may need to gain knowledge of identities that they themselves have little awareness of or experience with to gain capacity and cultural fluency. Spryte pointed to their Center's programming efforts, explaining "we have film festivals every year and the Center always pushes to make sure that a non-binary film is there, an asexual documentary is there." Offering more consideration and an example, they continued, "There's resources for basically anything you can identify as. I've never even heard of two-spirit before and we had the two-spirit talk." There was pride in their voice as Spryte expressed that the Center Director "goes out of his way to make sure that he can represent as many people as possible. And if anybody is missed, he does the best he can to somehow get them represented, which is awesome." Spryte, whose asexual identity is often experienced through erasure, expressed feeling so visible in the presence of Center staff, both valued and honored. The Center was the singular place on campus that Spryte felt they could be completely authentic and let down their guard.

Another student involved with her Center, Char appreciated "being able to talk about experiences and name them as homophobic or racist or sexist. So, having the working knowledge of how homophobia can manifest itself and to learn how to name that and call it out." But beyond simply being able to identify structures of inequality, she

appreciated opportunities to put her awareness to work. "I've definitely gotten more comfortable with calling people out. And, on the flip side, getting called out. And then there, it's more like racist and classist stuff that I do. Or definitely transphobic." Acknowledging her blind spots allowed her opportunities to grow as a social justice advocate, and to live the values that she claimed. "So, in the ways that I'm privileged," she explained, "I am learning to get better at owning up to my mistakes."

Jordan points to the challenging balance that Centers and Center staff must strike in cultivating a social justice lens with students because "getting students to really engage across difference can sometimes be difficult." Jordan points both to the difficulty of moving beyond just intellectual understandings of social movements to students' exploration of their own lived experience and the way their lives and choices reflect both privilege and oppression. It can be painful, he acknowledges, "really having to sit with the idea that, 'Oh, wow. I have transphobia in me that I have to unlearn.' Or, 'I have racism that I have to unlearn.' Or what-have-you." Smiling, he points out that these conversations come about in predictable and unpredictable moments. It can be especially challenging when students are unprepared to encounter their privileges or inadvertently or unintentionally reveal their individual biases and get challenged by others. "[It] can be a little bit trying for them, particularly if they just want to get with a group of queer people and just have fun." In these contexts, Center staff are often wearing multiple hats – helping students understand how they have transgressed, modeling healthy conflict behavior between peers who may be feeling injured and others who have caused injury, and providing pathways to redemption and models for recovery. All of these require nuanced understanding, training and experience to create the best educational and

learning outcomes for all parties involved.

Through her social justice development, Jade came to associate major LGBT archetypes as "very Western, white dominant terms" in ways that excluded or diminished participation among People of Color who, she observed, were more and more often identifying as queer. Yet when she would raise these as legitimate spaces for conversation within the existing safe zone program, she felt resistance and pushback. At the same time, program leaders failed to associate their resistance to addressing white privilege with the lack of participation in Center activities or the safe zone program. Jade pursued a very difficult conversation with one of the Center staff at the close of Fall semester. "I was like, 'We need to talk about things.' And I went to [him] and I was like, 'I wanna do something on the white privilege.' And he ran with that over the winter and he came up with this program." Together, they refined it and presented it to other core safe zone members. Marcus also recalled the conversation and the development of this social justice and intersectional approach to safe zone.

He acknowledged, "I think as far as actual content about the queer community, I was very oblivious about a lot of things." Developing allies to a broader conceptualization of the LGBTQ+ community was a start, but cultivating ally behavior that took into account power differences and advocated social justice continues to develop. "Being a white ally to Communities of Color and stuff, that came later. I didn't really start exploring that aspect until later. But that's one thing I learned to think about the diversity of the queer community." He is appreciative now that Jade advocated for broader discussion of power and privilege within safe zone. "I think that was some of my first introductions to the power relationships. A lot [more] would come later." Jade and

Marcus's recollections represented the beginning of a program's important culture shift that continues today, but Jade still sees room for additional growth. "I think that more Students of Color, in terms of our panels and volunteers, I think they are feeling more comfortable, but I still think we should do more."

Jordan elaborated further, characterizing formal training sessions as experiences that students can often hold at a distance. "It's like the students are in critique mode the entire time after one of those classes." The role of Center staff, and one that requires a particularly valuable skill set, is "to teach them how do you integrate this into your sense of self? How do you still, with this knowledge, meet people where they are? How do you bring this into a real world working situation?" Making sense of the learning in the context of lived experience is the critical take-away precisely because we don't live in a theoretical space. We live in a messy, uncomfortable and imperfect human context. He continued, "What's the point of the theory or the history if you can't actually reflect then upon your own experiences?" Or to an even greater degree, he challenged that it is the role of Center staff to help students get to a place where they can answer the question, "'Well then what do I do then with this guilt or shame or anger?' or what have you?" According to Jordan, allowing students space to resolve for themselves how they navigate their own intersectionality – often comprised of identities that embody both privilege and oppression – lies at the core of this work.

Intersectionality. Identity is complex, nuanced, and unique to each individual. It is subject to critical environmental variables that influence how a person experiences, responds to and embodies it daily, in ways that may be in or fall out of their control. Further, Abes, Jones and McEwen (2007) posit that an individual's multiple dimensions

296

of identity interact within an individual to influence how the person makes meaning of any of them individually, or all of them in congruence, to the degree that such is possible. It is critical that Centers and Center staff honor that students are present as whole people, certainly with sexual orientations and gender identities, but who also are racialized, gendered, embody varying degrees of physical ability, may take part in a faith tradition, represent a national identity or cultural heritage, among others. Development of identities most closely associated with LGBTQ+ Centers may or many not be a primary concern in the moment for a given student, but honoring that meaningful interactions around sexual orientation and gender identity need always be mindful of students' multiple dimensions of identity challenges Centers to attend to intersectionality as a fundamental precept of our identity work and expertise.

Participants in this study openly discussed some of their own critical intersections. In thinking about spaces that tended to inhibit his identity expression, Hector shared that the campus Chapel was "a place that just makes me more wary and shuts me down sometimes to express myself. But I think that's more of my own ideas, not so much [anything that] happened." Later, Hector would talk about the ways that campus religious life actively provided support for LGBTQ+ initiatives, but his own strict, Mexican-American Catholic upbringing made it persistently difficult for him to find a comfortable intersection between these two identity domains.

Tara saw a shift in her experience of faith in the context of her sexual orientation. Growing up in a relatively conservative, rural context left her with a very narrow view of Christian support for LGBTQ+ people. "I think one of the bigger things, we're in the Midwest, it's still very religious," she noted. But religious meant something different on

campus than it did for her elsewhere. "they had [the first openly gay Episcopal Bishop] Gene Robinson come, and it's something that I had not experienced – Christianity from a different viewpoint." She began to further explore an inclusive Christianity that she could take with her as she bridged her campus and home communities. Particularly, hearing from people of faith in support of gay marriage was powerful, especially when accompanied by advocacy tools. Tara recalled being empowered with "ways that I can combat [resistance] with the fact behind. 'Well, this was in a different time. They didn't have the concept of a gay relationship,'" is a claim that resonated for her as she engaged with friends and others. Humble about her own advocacy, she posited "that's helpful. So their representing the religious community alongside the gay community has been very helpful with that."

Other students found challenging intersections around race, language differences and generationality. G, whose parents emigrated to the United States, discussed the complex interaction of a few obstacles that inhibited sharing her developing identity understandings with her mother in a home where Spanish is the standard:

> I'm sure that the language is there. I just don't know how to do it because … I started speaking English when I was in kindergarten, and that's because I got exposed to it by my peers and my teacher. So, I wasn't a fluent English reader and writer up until fourth or fifth grade, according to academia, even though by first grade, I was already speaking full English. It's very... It makes it harder to switch your brain to go from very knowledgeable in the LGBT community and knowing the words and the terminology in English, and then trying to switch it into Spanish, and being able to put it in the same context.

> And especially to my mom who doesn't understand the idea of these identities. Just because I know that she's just very traditional with the clothing that she wears, with the way that she thinks. So, it's very... How do I say this? Just because there's such a big gap, it's hard for me to be able to translate that to have her understand, even though I don't necessarily think that she will never understand. I feel like it's a lot of work. And I haven't found a lot of resources in Spanish, but at

298

the same time, I haven't really looked for them because I don't think she's ready for me to do that next step yet.

Questioning the timing of coming out, finding the right vocabulary in an alternate language to express a nuanced identity understanding, and noting potential cultural resistance reflected through a parent's dress and adherence to more traditional cultural traditions all coalesce into a compelling context that feels inhibiting, although G very humbly takes responsibility for not being prepared or doing enough personal research to move forward.

Veronica shared a similar story of parents whose primary focus was integrating into American culture, raising successful children and establishing economic independence for the family. Little time or attention was given to identity, although Veronica was encouraged to take advantage of high school organizations that highlighted her Asian heritage and without the knowledge of her parents, took part in GSA, as well. On her very accepting college campus, Veronica began to feel that she was among just a handful of students who were not out to their parents. Perceived pressure to come out more fully seemed to mount from peers, but intersectional concerns prevented her from this disclosure. "I know my experiences are different [than those of my peers]. A lot of them are out and I'm like, 'I can't be out because of my parents – their culture is different.'" Rather than honoring that for her these intersectionalities created additional challenges, Veronica found her close LGBTQ+ friends were resistant to her context. She recalled being told, "'Oh you can talk to your parents, educate them slowly.' And I'm like, 'Well I have language barriers to worry about!'" These differences in home contexts are real for Veronica, but invisible to peers, and being required to articulate them in defense

of a very personal decision to come or be out at home felt diminishing to Veronica.

But Centers can help convey and model contexts and interactions that honor openness of expression around sexual orientation, gender identity and additional intersecting identities. Carlos talks with pride about being an indigenous Person of Color from the Southwest who sometimes struggles, and sees his family struggle with his sexual orientation. His interactions as student staff in the LGBT Center have helped him come to terms with a growing acceptance. Speaking of his peers and how students are expected to conduct themselves in the counterspace the Center provides, he shared that "they tackle intersections. They tackle your representation. I mean, just even having a space for people to come in as people. As indigenous people, we're always welcoming. So, you want people to be safe, you want people, you want community." Finding people who connect, on sexual orientation, on gender identity, or across dimensions of identity is critical to fostering acceptance and celebration of self from Carlos's perspective.

This is reflected in Center interactions along with the ways that Centers do outreach. "I do think of actively engaging within the campus and being proactive on the events that they do; it speaks in volumes." Carlos pointed to a recent Center co-sponsored series of films that featured LGBTQ+ themes through a Latino/a lens. Ale was the staff member who generated and coordinated the idea. She beamed as she went on to talk about the importance of the project:

> Most recently we showed a few films from queer directors, like the Latino queer director. And it was really cool. It was great and we got a lot of really good feedback from the people who attended, and they're very appreciative that we were showing a different side of the LGBT community, like the Latino side, and they were really happy about that. And I think if I'd have to say that the Center lacks something, or if there's something that they could sort of [improve upon] is definitely adding more, I think, just Color in general. Like emphasizing more

People of Color in the community because I think, a lot of the times, a lot of things we do and a lot of the people who are sort of emphasized in our events are usually white people…. And I think if we get to create a space where it's more open…, other people feel comfortable to come in and know that you could just really come in here to hang out.

Ale's sensibility is reflective of an ethos that pervades Centers. Attending to students in their wholeness is a critical value. For her, it's personal as well. "I definitely identify with my ethnicity a lot too, it's very important to me, as well as my gender. Being a woman, I'm also an advocate for... I'm a feminist." Living her own intersectionality means seeking to understand sexual orientation and gender identity as they influence and are influenced by other dimensions of identity. As such, she seeks creative collaborations with the Women's Center and Multicultural Center on her campus, and this has led to some meaningful engagement. "We work a lot together as the three Centers, so it's really great to have everything meshing together."

Craig describes Lavender Graduation as a Center-generated space that honors intersectionality. "It's voluntary, you don't have to do it, but if you identify as LGBTQ and you're graduating, it's just like a way that you can just show that that was a part of your identity as being here, too," he explains. While the ceremony honors graduates, the program takes time to discuss their involvement, their achievements, and their future plans. For each honoree, Craig notes that the ceremony identifies "all the things that you did in the past, like your involvement on campus, your involvement in the community, what you plan on doing afterwards." It also serves another higher-level purpose for Craig, as a "reminder like that, 'Hey, you did it and you're LGBTQ at the same time. Let's take this moment to reflect that.'" The implication of recognizing the obstacles that each student has overcome is to point out that "sometimes this does not happen for LGBTQ

kids. Or sometimes this does not happen for Black people, or… for men or women…. So, I just think the Center does a great job of acknowledging all of those different intersections."

Sam agreed that providing both subtext and articulation of the value of intersectionality was a strength of his Center. "I think that they do a really good job centering queerness within other identities, and I think that's something that has been really positive." Char sees the same outcome in her Center which moves the conversation from being to doing – specifically the ways that students can move towards breaking down intersectional institutions of oppression. "This isn't a one-or-the-other issue. We're focusing... We have resources for queer students, we have resources for Students of Color, we have resources for white students committed to racial justice and straight students committed to LGBTQ issues."

As Sam and Veronica point out, to be relevant to students, as they experience and make meaning of their multiple dimensions of identity, Centers must practice and cultivate intersectional approaches and honor the ways that students are present as multi-faceted, complex and developing individuals.

Practice Expertise

Theoretical expertise around LGBTQ+ identity development, the ability to cultivate social justice awareness, and efforts to address and honor intersectionality are core competencies provided by Centers and Center staff. Yet additionally, as Centers serving the needs of students with marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities have come into existence and flourished on campuses, the staff within them have grown to embody a practice expertise around LGBTQ+ issues, as well, encompassing areas of:

302

student experience; institutional policy and practice knowledge, and reporting and responding to incidents of bias; creating inclusive educational environments; and contributing to the curriculum.

Understanding the climate for and experiences of LGBTQ+ students. As LGBTQ+ content experts, a primary expectation of Center staff is to understand the climate for and experience of LGBTQ+ students. Because LGBTQ+ students represent a broad range of identities, experiences and expressions, maintaining an accurate sense of the climate and culture on campus is a process of constant refinement. Best practice for Centers around assessing campus climate necessitates the use of formal climate assessments undertaken at regular intervals, and which use formal quantitative and qualitative methods to describe the campus climate for LGBTQ+ people.

However, it also depends on meta-analysis of daily interactions with students, themselves, to provide for triangulation, and in which to ground this practice expertise, as Center staff listen to and understand the experiences and stories that students share. Doing so both richly enhances other climate data collected, and provides individuation that allows staff to provide targeted assistance and support to particular students who almost certainly experience the campus climate uniquely, dependent on their own personal circumstances. It also provides opportunities for Center staff to assess the needs of constituents. Jordan laughed as he concurred saying, "when you create a space for students to tell you what they need, they fill it up and say even more."

Trevor pointed to his own learning through interactions with Center users. "I've learned all sorts of content knowledge as far as vocab goes ... because many people have different identities. I've learned much about, I think, a lot about the nuances in working

with people with different identities." Kent concurred, noting that successful work with students required efforts to get to know them individually and build trust. Successful efforts to connect with students, in his view, are based on "an individual's personality versus their gender identity and sexual orientation." He continues, "that's important, it's important to embrace that, it's important to be accepting of that, but it's more important to know who individual students are and where they're involved, and what kind of things they like to do."

For Kent, it is assumptions and stereotypes that accompany particular sexual orientations or gender identities that Centers need to resist and push back against. "Not every transman is an athlete; not every transwoman isn't, right?" he asks. Instead, Kent promotes that Centers focus on empowering individuals to be themselves. "Because you're a transman doesn't mean that you can't be soft and gentle and weak, it doesn't mean you always have to be hyper-masculine, but you just, you need to be you and you need to be what's comfortable." He characterizes this as an essential Center priority.

Hearing the experiences and needs of students, opens doors to understanding how campuses need to change to be more accepting and welcoming of their identities and related needs. It often leads to conversations that advise students about how best to navigate through institutional obstacles alongside efforts to remove them. It also means empowering students to document negative experiences through bias reporting structures, and helping institutions respond appropriately to acts of intolerance.

Institutional policy and practice knowledge, reporting and responding. Successful administrators understand how to navigate the complex systems that comprise institutions of higher education to accomplish goals and get things done. They have

shown efficacy and grown through leadership roles as students, and been seasoned to an even greater degree as staff. LGBT Center Staff often bring their own marginalized sexual orientation or gender identity to the table, and have overcome identity-grounded institutional barriers to their own success – to wit, it is often this process of becoming and overcoming that motivates Center Staff to undertake identity and social-justice work. Indeed, Center Staff have successfully persisted as students and continue to successfully persist in administrative roles.

The value in noting that Center Staff have moved so far and achieved so much, often from their own socially disadvantaged positions, is to provide a reminder of how far removed that journey has displaced them from the present experiences of students, particularly students who are just recently matriculated, who have various experiences with the educational enterprise that shape and characterize their understanding of educational institutions, and who may have little or no skill set related to self-advocacy and navigating complex institutions of higher education in which they find themselves situated.

Skye shared the story of a partner who, after coming out, lost the financial support of parents for tuition and related expenses, but continued to be claimed on the family's tax returns. This inhibited the partner's ability to file independently for tuition assistance, as well as for some community supports. The student turned to Center staff to help understand the steps involved, and supports available, for students who pursue emancipation from their families. Center staff were able to help the student make connections with the Office of Financial Aid, Students Accounts, Parent and Family Outreach, and a campus legal clinic associated with the law school that provided advice

and assistance through the process. The student, alone, was unable to generate a comprehensive strategy that integrated all of the campus contacts that could create a network of support while emancipation efforts were pursued, but in concert with Center staff members familiar with institutional policy and practice, was able to connect with the right people to gain the right supports.

Brett, who served as graduate staff in his Center, was able to guide a student through a process that explored a response protocol for a student with marginalized sexual identity who found herself placed in a major-related international field placement that included elements of sexual harassment and violence. There were multiple layers of concern regarding the degree to which institutional protections and policies applied in the major-related out-of-country work experience, whether the laws applicable to the harassment and violence were US laws or those of the host country, and whether immediately available program supports had a level of LGBT cultural fluency and support given some of the overt hostility towards marginalized sexual orientations present in the host country. These complex issues required more advocacy capacity than the student was able to offer, and Center staff helped to provide support, gain answers and show responsiveness in ways that helped resolve a very messy situation effectively.

A number of transgender participants, at varying degrees of transition, talked about seeking Center staff to gain knowledge in the process of name determination and transitioning gender on campus. This often involves contacts with a broad range of administrative areas and personnel, such as those in university records, housing authorities, health services, and possibly athletics. In particular, students spoke of the stress involved when a student's preferred name, often selected to reflect a preferred

306

gender, is overlooked and a given or legal name is used in a public or semi-public context, such as a classroom, and the student is "outed" as gender non-conforming, or they are forced to provide correction or elaboration in a way that draws unnecessary attention to them. This misgendering or misnaming by faculty is experienced as a microaggression and can be incredibly frustrating for students. Kent spoke at length about the collective impact of being misgendered by multiple faculty members, some intentionally and others inadvertently, in classrooms. For other students, such as Brett, Spryte, Andi, and G, it is a reminder to them of their difference, and has the potential to mentally center their transition and identity dissonance in a space where attentions should be focused on classroom interaction and learning.

Jordan pointed out the many faculty that exhibited inclusive classroom behaviors around identity, such as the use of preferred name rosters and classroom introductions that universally include preferred gender pronouns, and honor that students embody some of the experiences and identities that course materials seek to unpack and explore. "I think there are many faculty who are regularly asking pronouns in the classrooms, approach topics of race, class and gender as if there was a real people in the room and not just walking brains," he related. Yet there are other faculty, he shared, who do "the bare minimum" and whose practice somewhat or barely meets institutional policy requirements for equity, but miss the spirit of institutional guidelines that foster inclusion of differences and that guarantee students' ability to express their authentic gender identity free of discrimination, intolerance, harassment and violence. Students are squeezed in these situations – if they confront the faculty behavior, they fear their academic work and contributions will be dismissed, that harsher grading will take place,

and that faculty will fail to reward them, by withholding mentorship, showing reluctance to serve as a reference, or declining to recommend the student for associated academic opportunities such as prestigious internships or summer programs, or may base decisions about inviting students as co-researchers into labs or projects on "fit" or considerations of peer group dynamics. In these cases, students and Center staff can use institutional channels, and employ policy and practice standards to compel inclusive learning contexts for students that somewhat buffer them from having to self-advocate directly with faculty members and jeopardize these value-added opportunities that accompany positive faculty connections.

There are additional effects upon students of misgendering and misnaming, as well. For some students, the experience can trigger past traumas around gender identity marginalization, harassment and violence that distracts from students' abilities to apply themselves academically. The increased attention it draws to students can lead students who already experience marginalization to be marginalized to a greater degree by peers, to be avoided when groups assemble for projects and assignments, to have classroom ideas and contributions ignored or dismissed, and even provoke overt peer reactions of disapproval, harassment, intolerance and potentially violence. Arica, who facilitates day-to-day Center operations on her campus, explained that a main purpose of the Center is to "bridge the gap between the students and the [institution]. And then also, I think we've served as a place where students can now feel like they can be more vocal, and that their issues are gonna actually be heard." She further explains that Center staff can help students develop empathy and understand that while the student embodies their trans identity in every classroom, it may be the first classroom experience where that particular

faculty member has a trans student and they may be imperfect or clumsy in the ways that they attempt to enact, or fail to understand the importance of enacting, inclusive classroom practices.

Yet she goes on to affirm that Center staff must also reach out to these faculty to reify campus policy expectations and offer classroom management techniques that may have been overlooked or deemed non-essential by these faculty in the absence of expressed concerns. Jordan summed up the need for staff to both empower students and to act on their behalf. He thinks of pushing students to self-advocacy as critical skill development, "because it certainly is a skill to navigate whiteness, to navigate heteronormativity, to navigate these structures that aren't [one's own] and still be successful. Like that is a skill that you need to start developing now," he tells students.

The presence and visibility of Centers may help students connect with one another and resources that support them. They provide essential advocacy for full inclusion of students with marginalized sexual orientation and gender identities, helping create congruence with Title IX compliance expectations and campus policies around inclusion and non-discrimination. And finally, Centers can help suggest and cultivate classroom and administrative practices that proactively include students rather than respond to their exclusion.

Centers can also help students document their experiences on campus, particularly when those experiences fall short of expectations and institutional promises for equity and non-discrimination. Beyond helping students gain the academic support and campus inclusion they deserve, Centers convey the importance and process of navigating reporting systems when students do experience intolerance, exclusion, harassment or

violence. At their most basic level, these response systems can help students gain the attention and services of a broad range of appropriate campus responders who can help them resolve micro- or macroaggressions.

But further, these bias reporting and response systems are critical because they contribute to an institutional data story around campus climate and the experience of students with marginalized identities. Institutions need these data stories to help inform campus decision-makers and invoke strategies at the highest levels that narrow the gap between the promised and delivered campus mission.

Finally, LGBT Centers and Center staff are often called upon to help individual students, and the campus as a whole, recognize, respond to, process through, and develop action around incidents of intolerance, harassment or violence that take place on campus, locally, or even nationally. This may be through sponsorship of Trans Day of Remembrance events, for instance, which recognize patterns of identity-based violence that end the lives of dozens of trans people each year across the nation. Or they may arise situationally. Sheryl, who oversees operations of multiple identity centers on her campus, used the growing crisis around the murder of unarmed Black men at the hands of law enforcement personnel or through enactment of "stand your ground" laws as a space where identity center staff were imbued with theoretical, process and situational expertise to lead meaning-making activities on campus and beyond:

> I'll use this as an example, but it's one that is pressing my mind. I was very concerned that we did not have a conversation this past year around all the things that were happening [related to #blacklivesmatter]. That's what I mean in terms of being responsive to events that are happening around. So, and when I say responsive, I mean in terms of having an opportunity to have a conversation about it. So, I think that we'd wanna be poised to do that and to be aware of what those issues are, and to be able to talk about them and bring people together to create

continued levels of understanding. And this, again, is not just for people in the community, but for the broader campus community.

This process of helping the community come to terms with its best intentions, to make meaning, collectively and individually, of the unthinkable, and to determine how best to enact social change is challenging work that requires the relationships that Centers have established, fostered and continue to leverage, as well as the unique blend of expertise that Center staff have assembled around identity development, educational inclusion and best practice, and the ability to develop and promote events and programs effectively. It is a critical skill set unmatched in whole by other campus service providers and supports, who might be assembled in collaborative response to similar circumstances, but in potentially unwieldy ways that fall outside of their standard practice, pressures and priorities.

In addition to helping LGBTQ+ students navigate complex institutional systems that may provide barriers to their full inclusion, advocating and informing institutional actors about policies and practices that encourage or mandate equity, encouraging reporting bias incidents, and responding to acts of intolerance, Center staff work to shape and develop more informed and inclusive educational environments for students through ongoing contact with allies and others.

Creating inclusive educational environments. Considerable discussion about the educational practices and outreach undertaken by Centers has already taken place, and so won't be reproduced here. Yet it is worth a brief reminder that the practice of education around marginalized identities, particularly those grounded in sexual orientation and gender identity, is nuanced in ways that differentiate LGBT Center staff

and the accompanying expertise, from others who also do identity work in other critical areas, or from staff who do general multi- or inter-cultural work, or practice student affairs in other ways. Knowledge of appropriate terminology, cultural fluency and the ability to bridge knowledge to internal and external constituencies provides a unique space from which Center staff are able to act and interact.

Jordan highlighted critical conversations with students that he and other identity center staff get tapped to lead, or find involvement in because of time, place and expertise, that involve, for example, responding to students' use of "harmless" pejoratives that serve to microaggress marginalized students. He makes use of those moments when students are made aware of the power of unintentional microaggressions by extending these examples to expose cultural assumptions that frame and invisibly undergird systems of oppression:

> [It is a] way of talking about socialization and unlearning behaviors, because then it's a perfect way. If you can get that, "Oh wow, I don't mean to say 'That's so gay' like as a slur or anything like that, but it's just what I'm used to." Then you can start saying, "Oh yeah and I'm just used to the fact of not thinking about Native American genocide," or "I'm used to just not thinking about, oh yeah, we're assumed to be heterosexual." You can start understanding the idea of scripts, I think, a little bit easier.

Exposing these cultural scripts, and helping students to understand how they normalize and enforce existing power structures is essential to making the institutionalized nature of oppression visible, and equipping students with tools to transform themselves and society. It is both a core role of Centers, and often a primary mission outcome of higher education institutions.

Likewise, Centers help to develop classroom management techniques and promote inclusive pedagogies among faculty through formal development activities,

312

mentorship and ongoing contact. To that end, Michel disclosed, "I've been getting more phone calls from faculty saying, 'I'm dealing with this situation in my classroom. I don't know how to handle it.'" Faculty reach out for assistance in strategizing appropriate ways to confront microaggression, balance principles of academic freedom with socially just mindsets, and create fully inclusive learning environments. Center staff reach out with strategies that faculty can employ to allow students to explore identity through a disciplinary lens through coursework and assignments, to foster inclusion of diverse voices among texts assembled for course inclusion or to highlight contributions of marginalized peoples to the development of relevant knowledge. G shared a faculty collaboration called "Science with Pride" that involved working with a department to highlight across classes the LGBT backgrounds of critical scholars. Pointing out that personal characteristics of scientists are often dismissed as subjective and non-essential to their research work and knowledge creation, G suggested that identity characteristics are relevant and appropriate to highlight so that identity erasure does not diminish the contributions of LGBTQ+ scientists, Women in science, and Scientists of Color. Conveying scholars' backgrounds can foster student interest based on shared identity characteristics, empower marginalized students to see and realize their own achievement potentials, and place knowledge creation in context. For instance, G discussed coming to realize that an early focus on researching cancers that disproportionally affect women was enacted by Women scientists, and the related potential she had to consider and give focus to scientific questions associated with her own cultures and identity development.

Helping faculty manage and navigate challenging interactions that include identity elements is another unique expertise associated with Center staff. Approached

initially by a faculty department chair who was managing complex dynamics between

and among faculty peers, with concerning and competing elements related to identity

intersections, Michel found himself tapped for his multicultural fluency, problem-solving

capacity, and knowledge of mediation and interpersonal dynamics. These skills sets

coalesced in a particular way that allowed him to facilitate a resolution to the situation

that had eluded the faculty chair. After the crisis had passed, he recalls, "she sat in my

office, and she was like, 'I wish I knew that you had existed.' Because I taught her about

how to do mediation, and stuff like that." While he remains humble about his role and the

reach and impact of his efforts, this faculty member has become a staunch ally and

advocate for his work, and the work of the Center moving forward. Because she is

particularly influential with faculty peers, this instance of extending himself in support of

resolving a non-student, Center-peripheral conflict, has helped establish his content

expertise and created leverage for the Center to access opportunities that had been

unavailable previously.

  Contributing to the curriculum. Centers also contribute to the core instructional

mission of the institution in a number of ways. Leaders of two campus Centers discussed

partnering with interdisciplinary cohorts of faculty partners to create and establish LGBT

Studies major and minor programs of study. And to set the stage for these diverse

programs of study that span the curriculum, Center staff have been contributing to course

content in significant ways.

  Centers have long organized LGBTQ+ students into identity panels that serve

classroom needs by sharing individual stories, identity experiences and providing

visibility for marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities. Largely providing

opportunities to "come out" to majority students, counter stereotypes and provide honest response to basic queries, these well-trained student ambassadors have intersected with courses across the campus.

Center staff have been tapped, too, to provide expert instruction on LGBTQ+ related issues. Eric talked about regularly being asked to guest lecture on topics such as the economic influence of gay consumers in a marketing class, or the history of LGBT social change movements, as a few examples. Center staff can often be counted on to help bridge the gap between identity and course content when faculty feel their knowledge or expertise is limited, but still desire to foster inclusion of difference in exploration of the discipline.

And Center staff are providing instruction or co-instruction in ways that leverage content expertise in interesting ways. Some Center staff are tapped to lead life skills-based or orientation-related courses that draw upon the general college success knowledge that forms a basis for student affairs practice. Others are invited to apply their knowledge of identity development and related theory through collaborations that are interdisciplinary or take on a disciplinary focus. Michel was invited to co-instruct with an administrative peer who held a dual faculty appointment in Sociology. While the class was grounded in "certain fundamental aspects around society difference and identity" which connected into his body of work and a familiar social justice canon, he recalls that his thinking and framing of those articles and texts "had to shift. The literature base had to be more psych and social psych based for it to get class credit."

Eric similarly was able to co-teach a History course with a tenured faculty partner, now offered annually, that explores the historical impact of social change movements

315

related to LGBTQ+ identity, though travel to major sites of cultural development and activism, such as San Francisco, New York, Paris, Berlin and Amsterdam.

In addition to contributing to classroom experiences, providing instruction and co-teaching courses, some Centers house faculty positions or are themselves housed within academic departments, such as Women and Gender Studies, Cultural or American Studies, or Queer Studies, as a few examples. And Centers provide support for and home to research activities of faculty, related research projects (such as this dissertation which was supported by Centers on three campuses) or independent research and knowledge generated by Center staff.

Fostering Identity Development

Bandura (1994) describes self-efficacy in terms of a person's "beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives" (p. 71). Self-efficacy is associated with feelings of personal well-being, individual accomplishment and self-esteem. Those with high self-efficacy tend to view obstacles as challenges and work to master or overcome them, rather than perceiving them as threats to be avoided. High self-efficacy fosters a deep engagement in life activities, establishment of reach goals and the persistence and resilience to achieve them. A strong sense of self, and in one's skills, abilities and capacity to overcome challenges fosters resiliency in the face of failure. Setbacks and adversity are situated as externally imposed limitations, not as personal deficiencies. Understood as insufficiencies in skills, knowledge or effort, a lack of success can be countered by renewed motivation, commitment and enterprise. This outlook can provide a buffer against stress, depression and hopelessness in the face of adversity.

316

LGBTQ+ people often come to understand their sexual orientation and gender identity through a lens of social disapproval, intolerance and marginalization. They further confront frequent barriers to their full inclusion and participation on campus and in society, and may encounter identity-based resistance, aggression and violence (Dilley, 2002; Rankin, 2003). To counter this negative socialization, prejudice and stigmatization often requires "identity work" or active engagement around issues and understandings related to identity, such as unlearning of misinformation and development of capacity around self-advocacy. Developing and gaining self-efficacy around the way a person understands, experiences and embodies an LGBTQ+ identity is a complex process unique to every person. However, identity theorists have created a rich literature that describes common experiences, milestones and obstacles in these processes (Beemyn & Rankin, 2011; Bullough, 1998; Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger, 1998; Troiden, 1989).

For staff who work in LGBT Resource Centers, and to degrees for other professionals who work with and advocate for LGBTQ+ communities, the nuanced identity expertise reflected by a thorough understanding of this collection of theories in the context of social justice and intersectionality, along with the practice expertise gained from working with LGBTQ+ individuals and the institutions, particularly higher education institutions, and institutional systems they encounter combine to create a unique and indispensable skill set that fosters growth and development of LGBTQ+ identity.

There is essential value in the role of LGBT Centers as they intentionally foster the development of comfortability and confidence congruent with LGBTQ+ identity self-efficacy, and a strong identity foundation and skill set from which to develop and attain

317

educational and life goals and aspirations. To that end, Center staff endeavor to promote

identity self-efficacy, to connect intellectual understandings and lived experiences of

identity, to honor the ways that critical identity intersections influence identity

development, to understand concepts of outness and the experience of coming out as

LGBTQ+.

Promoting identity self-efficacy. Centers provide physical spaces and their

activities provide environments where students can interact with one another and with

professionals who have considerable expertise around sexual orientation and gender

identity and associated developmental trajectories. Through these interactions and

experiences, individuals are provided with opportunities to understand, explore and

deepen their own developing sexual orientation and gender identity through a process of

cognitive apprenticeship (Brandt, Farmer & Buckmaster, 1993; Merriam, Cafferella &

Baumgartner, 2007). Cognitive apprenticeship patterns the acquisition of culture,

knowledge and cultural practice and expression after craft apprenticeship practices. In

this way, individual identity self-efficacy is gained as identity and identity-related

behaviors are articulated or modeled by others, with personal capacity gained first

through coaching and scaffolding, then through personal exploration and cultural

engagement, followed by individualized and self-directed learning, and ultimately

resulting in a comfortability that fosters the ability to apprentice others.

A safe space that fosters engagement around identity, with an emphasis on

articulation and modeling is a critical catalyst for this process, and the physical space the

Center provides, as well as the programming environments and brave spaces that they

embody are important incubators for this process of identity acquisition. "It's really

important to kinda foster that open environment so that the fact that you know that you could go to the [LGBT Center] or the [LGBT organization], which is in the Student Center," shared Craig when asked to describe an essential value that Centers provide. He continued "the fact that you could go to any of those places and talk to kids who are going through kinda the little same experiences."

Similarly, Chelsea explained that she spends several hours a day in the Center on her campus because "when I go there, I'm accepted and it's fine, and everybody likes me, or even if they don't like me they still accept me and it's fine." As someone who identifies within the "plus" she finds herself drawn into conversation frequently about her identity and the way it confounds or confuses others. "I think sometimes some people war with themselves [over] my identity, like in the Center they're like, 'Well, is she gay enough?' And maybe I'm not. I don't know." And for her, the answer to the question may not matter as much as the question itself and the ability of peers to ask her and the sharing that follows. She summed up, "I think it's really interesting because the plus doesn't get talked about a lot." Chelsea's willingness to engage with peers, and to share openly, both the way that she understands herself, as well as her journey of self-discovery and identity evolution is instructive to peers and meaningful as they have helped and continue to help her gain capacity around issues and conversations related to identity.

Particularly for students who have not had opportunities to openly share and discuss identity in their past experiences, Centers and the space they provide can be invaluable. Jade reflected, "I think that for me, definitely working in the Center has made me a lot more comfortable with my identity. When I first started here, I was obviously out. I've been out since I was 16," she says with a flourish, vogueing, and then vogueing

319

again before continuing, "but I wasn't necessarily always comfortable talking about it, especially with people that I wasn't close with or anything."

Faith was quick to note her own growth. Returning to a campus environment in adulthood and separated by decades from most of her peers, she expressed that the many opportunities to engage with fellow students and grow her knowledge around "all of those different concepts like gender identification and romantic orientation and all the various concepts of sexual orientation and stuff that they talk about or we talk about when we're together has helped me to feel more comfortable."

As a staff member, Jordan knows the value of this process. Engagement with others is a large part of how identity is acquired and how students come to discover themselves and put language to their feelings and experiences. "Getting people to actually talk about their own experiences with it, instead of just what area that this exists and, 'Oh I have a new vocabulary word to learn.'" He laughs, pointing out that it is paradoxically simple and complex at the same time. "No, it's not vocabulary, it's about what have you known about yourself and what haven't you known?"

Beyond simple identity sharing and comparing, however, significant milestones and experiences help articulate experience and culture, and create opportunities for developing students to explore and practice alternative ways of knowing and expressing themselves. "It's a space for intentional discussion about identity and intentional discussion about how our identities are reflected in and play into everything that we experience," Lindsey explained, describing the content of a social LGBT club's meetings. "It's often a place of commiserating and it's often a place for celebrating…. But for the most part, it's just like intentional conversation, intentional community." It's also a place

320

to practice new skills, such as those of mindfulness, language intentionality and inclusion, which become critical considerations as more nuanced and individualized identities are explored and adopted. Mary, who is Lindsey's counterpart and co-leader of the same club that caters to lesbian women, bi- and pansexual women, queer women and transwomen, both gay and straight, cautioned, "but also we have to be very careful about when we talk about attraction, making sure that we're not being, that we're not excluding people in the way we talk about things." It's clear that this is a consideration of critical importance to Mary because it is a way that she shows care for others, and articulates their value to her and to the group. But it is also challenging and exhausting, and a reminder of imperfection and growth yet to come for herself and for other group members. She continues that it's "just being a lot more deliberate with language than maybe we thought we had to be originally. I think that's really beneficial."

The daily stresses and interactions of living as an LGBTQ+ person becomes the substance of many of these interactions for students, as they help develop each other around identity and identity resilience in the face of social obstacles and microaggressions:

> We just were able to connect and to talk about the shitty stuff that had happened that week, and comfort each other and support each other. Everything ranging from like a professor making a comment in class that was problematic or fears about going home after this first year at [college] where like, we had an opportunity to grow politically and grow emotionally, and we weren't sure how to balance those two things.

As a transitioning transwoman, Andi's experience is a little different. The Center provides a space of physical and emotional safety, but also a place to practice and embody a growing awareness and practice of self. "I'm sure college life, in general, has

321

pushed me to be more open. Being around the Center and being with people who are just

so open with themselves and with other people has pushed me," she explains, "not

pushed me, but like I've just become comfortable with myself just opening up. I can

finally open up around people and not feel like I'm really different." She juxtaposed her

relative freedom to explore and express on campus with feelings of confinement before

college. "At home, I couldn't do that. We had like maybe one person who was out as gay

in the entire community for like four years. And, I mean, I couldn't come out as trans."

Students also develop complex and nuanced self-understandings that reflect

significant engagement with their own feelings and experiences, as well as with identity

theory, and that reflect significant personal capacity for developing similar skills and

abilities in others. For instance, Brett explained how he conceptualizes his identity:

> [I] identify as a queer transman. Queer, for me, is not what's expected. So,
> pushing back against society. So, I don't feel that I fit in the gender binary very
> well. I feel I always call it my "lesbian heritage"…. For me, part of my gender
> identity is being out in the open as a trans person, because I want people, I want to
> challenge people's assumptions about the gender binary and also I want them to
> think broadly about who is trans, right? I always joked that we're everywhere, you
> just don't know it. So I want them to acknowledge that a little bit, that trans
> people, while we're not always visible, we are around.

For Brett, part of the value of identifying as he does is the developmental and

instructional value that his ability to explain it has in the identity journey of those he

encounters. His conceptualization of queer is always dependent on its relation to others,

as it fails to comport with how he might otherwise be perceived. Its transgressive power

is entirely situated externally. Tara had a similarly complex description of her identity

and how she came to an awareness of it:

> I identify as a female. The sexuality thing is [pause] I'm trying to completely
> figure it out right now. Coming to college is like, "Yeah, I'm bisexual." But then

I've realized that I'm not as attracted to men as I thought I was. So I'm [pause] I don't [pause] Those butterfly feelings and all that stuff like when you get [pause] I don't have that towards men, so I'm like, I think I'm romantically attracted to females, and I don't really [pause] so I think I'm bisexual, homo-romantic. Before [college], I knew none of that. And then, hearing [Center staff] talk about it, and some of the current leaders in the LGBTQ community, the student leaders are very social justice orientated. And then, I think you interviewed [a graduate student peer] yesterday. So, [that peer] and his partner, I've heard them talk, and it's just, they've made me more aware of broader issues, and the more detailed orientation. So, I did not realize that I could be sexually attracted to both men and women, but have a romantic attraction to just women before I came here. So, it's been the Center, and then from what I've heard, those kind of conversations weren't happening before the Center came along. So it's been the Center and then the trickle-down effect from the Center.

Many students were able to describe in detail individualized, complex identities reflective of their experiences and social positioning. Another example came from Jade:

When I first came to [my institution], I identified as bisexual. And I don't identify as bisexual anymore because it's just the knowledge that I got within working here, expanding my view of the community and stuff, I was just like, "You know what, that term doesn't really feel comfortable for me." So, usually when we do panels, I will identify as a queer, bi-racial, black woman, also cisgender. So, for me, queer encompasses the fact that I have dated men and women, cisgender men and women. But, I've also been attracted to people who don't fit in that binary. And that for me, the term "queer" is very, like I said, it's very political and it also encompasses the way that I view gender. Because I think that in a lot of ways, I am cisgender. But then, when I think about personality and interests and stuff like that, there's a lot of assumptions that come along with that. And that, I don't necessarily conform to a lot of those gendered expectations. And that, I very much actively try to challenge those within being very feminine. So, I know, there've been times when I'm like, "You know, maybe I shouldn't wear a suit or not dress as feminine, or do this... People might take me more seriously." Then I'm like, "No, be feminine, be super-fem and go out there and take control of this room and be assertive. That's who you are." So, I think that, for me, identifying as queer encompasses a lot of that because I also like the flexibility of the term "queer" because like how you said, I identify as bisexual. And I was like, "Hmm, it sounds very clinical." I don't really like the term "homosexual" either that much. It just sounds very clinical and it's very binary, too. And, I also like the openness of when I identify as queer. Then people go, "Well what do you mean?" And then, I get to actually explain to them instead of them making all these assumptions.

For Brett, Tara and Jade, a critical element of their identity awareness and

experience is that way that it has and continues to be interactive and engaging within and beyond an LGBTQ+ community. Identity and expression become closely linked as interaction fosters ongoing cycles of cognitive apprenticeship and further identity development work. Additionally, in each case, the resulting and evolved self-understanding bridges theory and experience. Helping students gain this critical balance as they embody identity intellectually and experientially is a second value that Centers create around identity development and acquisition.

Connecting intellectual understandings and lived experiences of identity.
Creating connections between individuals' intellectual understandings of their identity and identity development, and their lived experiences as LGBTQ+ people is an important outcome of developing identity self-efficacy. Favoring either lived experience or theoretical understanding may create or reinforce emotional distance that buffers painful identity-related experiences, but may also diminish associated growth opportunities and hinder the full development of personal capacities. Those who capture this balance between experience and understanding are more apt to see the ways that an awareness of their identity in the context of their experiences provides maximum opportunities for growth and self-enhancement.

Carlos discussed the benefits and challenges implicit in seeking and finding this balance. "You find out there's so many different variations of identity and how you can express yourself and what it all means that it's fascinating." Despite that, however, Carlos explained that "you might not ever explore it because we're out here doing. We're all working, we're all trying to get our good grades and go on to the next level." As the limited commodity, there is significant competition for students' time and attention, and

324

identity work consumes both to a considerable degree. Carlos explains that helping students see the benefits of their investment is important. "I think this exposure has definitely challenged me in the way that I talk, and in the way of listening to what I'm gonna say, how I'm gonna say it."

Explaining a traditional Day of Silence event on campus, Sam also emphasized the importance of and enhanced outcomes that result from this balanced approach. Over the course of being on campus and seeing the Day of Silence program in several iterations, Sam experienced years when "it's just like, 'This is the day everyone needs to wear a t-shirt and not talk.'" He explained that when the emphasis focused on implementation at the expense of conversations about why it was taking place and its importance, participation diminished. "A few people would be silent in one part of campus with signs talking about why it was happening that way, and what it means." In other years, conversation was more robust within planning groups whose leaders asked, "'Is this really valuable?' Like asking a question about whether or not the whole thing is worthwhile, or what the event is saying" coupled with "good discussions about what silence means to begin with, and if silence is helpful." Sam explained that the best iterations of the event were experienced when participants were "talking about why it's happening, but questioning why it's happening, too, and the way it's happening." Efforts that were most balanced in their approach to developing support but also cultivating an understanding of their value, were those whose impact was felt more profoundly.

Jordan explored breaking down the either/or approach to theory and experience as a challenge for Centers and Center staff to manage. Just as we commit to deal with students as whole people in all their individual complexity, we must ask them to hold

325

themselves to that same standard:

> I'm still trying to get students in particular to feel more, right? Instead of just being in their heads. "So what does this actually mean for you?" And actually getting them to stop talking about the theory as much as to actually talk about what are they experiencing. And that is one of the hardest challenges I've had here, because it's so comfortable for them to retreat back into [theory].

He goes on to give an example of a somewhat frequent scenario where a student acting as an ally to a community is questioned or called out around their allyship, or challenged on behavior incongruent with articulated support. Often the student assumes a defensive posture that attempts to shift the focus away from the experience in question and its real impact on individuals or the community by situating it in a learning context. This often sounds like "I'm learning" or "I'm trying" or "No one has taught me that x leads to y," for instance. It becomes a question of what a person knows rather than how they experience the incongruent consequences of their own action or inaction. Jordan advocates that along with a conversation about how they move forward by gaining the knowledge and skills they need to live out their values or commitments, Center staff also need to engage around the experience of falling short. "If you can get that and also, do you get that part, your defensiveness this is your own guilt and shame. You have to get into that part of it," he emphasized, "because if you don't get to that part of it, you're gonna always find ways of excusing or dodging what is the underlying issues."

Lindsey has been involved in personal identity work as well as identity advocacy on her campus for several years, and now as a Senior, finds value in the bridge between intellectual understanding of identity and the lived experience of it. This was counter to her early experiences where theory felt more out of reach in comparison to her experience as an LGBTQ+ Woman. She explained:

326

The focus on intentionality and intentionally owning and living your identities—living through your identities and the importance of lived experiences … is something that I really struggled with at the beginning in my academic journey. I was feeling like the theory was so far out of reach, and it's so academic and theorized and "discoursey," and written, and how is this anywhere applicable to my life? And I think through working with the [Center], I've really been able to make the connections and through the community that the [Center] has provided, really been able to make the connections between theory and practice, and intentionality.

Other classrooms also offer opportunities for identity exploration. Mary related, "I'm an English major, so we read a lot of stuff that I feel related to sometimes. I feel like English is one of the few disciplines where you're allowed to really bring your own experiences to the discussion." For Trevor, a class on Queer Theory provided the foundation on which to understand what he was feeling and experiencing. "I came out to myself when I was 20 after taking a Queer Theory class. I always think, in looking back, it's like I needed the theoretical background backing and the reading." Trevor had previous romantic and intimate experiences with women and with men, but had never really felt that bisexuality reflected his understanding of himself or his feelings. Encountering Queer Theory in the classroom was a turning point:

I needed to read because I'm a read-write learner. I can't really do things with people giving me the instructions to do them. Like assemble something? I would never be able to assemble something if someone was telling me the step by step process. But if I have a book about something, I could read the book, understand it well, and talk about it for days. So I've always been a read-write learner. And yeah, reading and writing about queer and all the different meanings that the word "queer" itself could mean for different people and the politicization of the term really resonated with me when I took Queer Theory. So I came out to myself [as pansexual], and I was just like, "Okay, well, this is my experience with my sexual identity or sexual orientation," I guess. I recognized that I wouldn't ever be straight or gay. So I came out to myself.

Yet all courses of study are not so accommodating, and even students with majors that explore elements of marginality and oppression can feel bounded in the intersections

with sexual orientation and gender identity that are presented or omitted. Jade shared her experience as an ethnic studies major. "In my courses, sexuality and gender identity, gender, not even the whole binary concept. It's hardly ever brought up." It's clear that she would invite these conversations about critical intersections, and her demeanor conveys her disappointment. "And if it is, it's put aside and it's just like, 'Oh, we're gonna talk about this in a psych class or a human sexuality class.'" Jade sees this as a shuffling among faculty of the shared responsibility for addressing difference and diversity in the curriculum. Even the very faculty that express disappointment that discussions of race and ethnicity are restricted to courses in ethnic studies rather than addressed throughout the curriculum turn a similar blind eye towards issues of sexual orientation or gender identity in their own courses.

Jordan explains that for some students the curriculum itself can make theory an adversary of experience. "That's the piece that is demoralizing for students the most. Because I think you can expect people to make mistakes or coming from different places, and not everyone has had exposure to different cultures." He offers an example of science classrooms where social constructions of sexual orientation and gender identity are posited as binary and natural, and challenge is unwelcome. These conversations are "basically a dagger through the heart for certain trans students, just because of the nature of how they're gonna be talking about bodies, right?" Faculty can be just as quick to use intellectual inquiry as a way to distance and buffer course content from criticism related to inclusion, saying "Oh, we're just having an intellectual conversation here, we're not talking about bodies," but Jordan counters that defense, saying, "Well, but you kinda are, because you can't abstract this theory or whatever from actual bodies and histories and

stuff like that. I think, one of the huge conflicts is how, we're not just talking about for argument's sake." He reminds his faculty colleagues that they are teaching students whose existence is a challenge to what they are learning in the classroom, particularly reinforced for trans students by their daily stress experiences in bathrooms and living units. "Your [intellectual] argument has consequences for my living and being," he reinforced, a modern echo of the movement's maxims that the personal is the political, and that silence equals complicity.

Intersectionality and unlearning. As a function of fostering identity self-efficacy, the spaces that Centers create for identity exploration must also be intersectional, and honor the multiple identities that influence, interact with and shape LGBTQ+ identity. As an expertise intimately associated with identity theory and development, intersectionality has already been explored as a critical knowledge domain for practitioners. Participants in this study had much to say about the ways that exploring LGBTQ+ identity through an intersectional lens created depth for them, answering some questions and offering others.

Karla who manages operations that encompass diversity and inclusion efforts across identities, including LGBT Center operations, explained that the development of the Center and LGBTQ+ outreach was both centered on an intersectional approach to identity, but reflected the multiplicity of identities represented by the staff and student staff, who use their own development trajectories to help provide a framework and substance for identity explorations:

> All of our work has been centered on multiple identities and intersectionality within those identities from the beginning, from when we created the department. And so, as far as thinking about LGBTQ identity and students, they've always

329

been involved in our work and I would say every year we've had students who identify as queer, kind of be a part of our student staff, so they're a part of the programming, and they really are really good at bringing that lens into programs and things that we do.

Brett emphasized that development of a positive LGBTQ+ self concept is a critical outcome of identity work, but intersectionality builds additional layers of meaning in that evolution by inviting careful examination of one's own attitudes and unintentional socialized biases. "Working to reduce horizontal oppression and racism in the LGBT community is really important. The Center is definitely taking the lead on that."

Char shared her own experience coming to terms with aspects of her self that didn't align with her self-concept of being inclusive. In several instances, she shared, friends whose identities varied from her own in important ways had "been really generous with me in telling me when I've messed up. And it has definitely hurt." Sharing this story of vulnerability is difficult, but important for Char, and she admits that in the face of those early challenges, "I don't think I responded very well and I got really defensive and somehow we were able to work through that and they stuck with me, which I'm super grateful for." She has grown more aware and mindful of the impact of her words and actions through her development, but still finds moments of growth:

> I was just on a menstrual health panel and my friend just mentioned to me that one of the other panelists was describing a menstrual device that people who aren't really comfortable either wearing feminine underwear or putting something up their vagina, could use. So, more for like masculine of center people. And then I, pretty quickly after that, jumped in to talk more about how much I love the Diva Cup and my friend was just like, "That might not have been the best time to do that and it kind of felt like you were detracting from the importance of this other menstrual option." Which kind of sucked to hear, cause it's like, "Oh crap, I totally did that and I totally jumped in at an inappropriate time to talk more about something that we had already talked about." But I'm so grateful for getting that feedback so I can grow.

Particularly at the intersections of identity–those places where LGBTQ+ identity encounters other marginalized differences, both internally as students come to understand their own multiple layers, and externally as they interact with others who have meaningful differences of identity and experience than their own–Jordan describes the critical discomfort that accompanies the important process of unlearning. "Having to sit with the idea that, 'Oh, wow. I have transphobia in me that I have to unlearn.' Or, 'I have racism that I have to unlearn.' Or what-have-you," may be realizations that students who are gay, lesbian, or bisexual have to work through. "Or even getting into the idea, like, 'I still have heterosexism and change and stuff that I have to unlearn,' can be a little bit trying for them," because it may hit closer to home. Being the target of marginalization can be trying and painful, but being both the target and source of that marginalization at the same time requires that students break down layers of internalized and inculturated prejudice and self-loathing. Developing a more positive identity self-concept and coming to terms with one's social role and responsibility as a social actor is liberating, but requires a considerable commitment on the part of students, "particularly if they just want to get with a group of queer people and just have fun." As a student who has committed to this developmental trajectory, Char observed that:

> I think that there's a lot of beauty in not just focusing on LGBT students as a group, and not just focusing on Students of Color as a group. Or I shouldn't say LGBT students, but queer issues or racism. Because, obviously, white students are implicated into some sort of racism. But that the [Center] does a really good job of saying this isn't a one-or-the-other issue.... We have resources for queer students, we have resources for Students of Color, we have resources for white students committed to racial justice and straight students committed to LGBTQ issues. So, I think that some of the most important lessons I've learned in my time working with the [Center] have come through figuring out my shit as a white person, which was combined with feeling supported as a queer person. So, I think there was both feelings of support and feelings of great discomfort that I just kind

331

of needed to work through.

Max described one way that a Center really intentionally took up this work. As a student with a non-white heritage, Max is often assumed and understood to be white by others, and generally experiences the world as a white person. He explained, "I don't identify as a Person of Color because I don't feel like I can claim that because I look white," yet his social groups span racial boundaries, and his social justice work and interests are just as often centered in race work as LGBTQ+ advocacy, which led him to continue, "but I'm still kind of within that group of people as well because of just the shared kind of cultural understanding, and just like making friends with people." Sponsorship of conversations that span identities is an important aspect of his Center's approach to addressing intersectionality, as through the development of an identity collective retreat. Discussing critical intersections, and groups of students who represent them, Max began to make a list. "There's a working class one, and there's different racial ones. And there's Latino and Latino Women and Non-binary folk of the Diaspora." Because the conversations are ongoing, their substance changes, but the experience is always grounded in "how to facilitate discussions across differences and things like that." Max's interest in these conversation is clear as he continues to chronicle opportunities for intersectional engagement that both represent his own experiences or provide entirely new perspectives. "They had one on autism and working with students with autism. And they've had them on gender issues, and they've had them on different kinds of race issues. And they've had them on different kinds of disability things." He paused attempting to assure a complete list before he concluded, "There's all sorts of difference, so it's on intersections of those things."

Jade's conclusion was consistent with that of others who highlighted the value and importance of intersectional explorations as they contribute to LGBTQ+ identity self-efficacy and the purpose and value of Centers. "I think that on this campus, whether it's reflected in our mission or just things that we need to do, that the intersectionality is something that we probably do need to be more adamant about addressing."

A final way that Centers serve to foster identity development is preparing students to come out and be out in ways that contribute to their ability to exist as fully authentic and wholly valued individuals.

Understanding concepts of outness. In his theory of lesbian and gay identity development, D'Augelli (1994) posits that in a heteronormative social environment, gays and lesbians, as non-dominant social actors, must continually tell others about their identity or be assumed heterosexual. To explore and experience the world authentically, LGBTQ+ lives require a constant and continual process of coming out. Sexual orientation and gender identity may be expressed and articulated verbally or through non-verbal social cues, such as through dress that transcends or flouts cultural norms and expectations or the display of symbols, such as jewelry pieces reflective of LGBTQ+ culture.

Risks of coming out are emotional, physical and social, with LGBTQ+ people more likely than heterosexual peers to experience microaggression, depression and anxiety, substance abuse, isolation, health affects and victimization (Rankin, 2003; Sue, 2010). Yet coming out can also enhance esteem, self-worth and foster individual actualization (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994). Students find varied solutions in regard to balancing the potential positive and negative outcomes associated with coming out. For

instance, Sam explained, "I identify as trans, but I'm not out on campus except to individual people, I think for fear of perception, but I don't know how much that's [my environment] versus myself." He further discussed his perceptions and motivations, "I think I'm mostly concerned about the way I am seen on campus… and how coming out as trans would impact relationships I have with some of my friends, I guess, less close friends."

It may feel that personal risks associated with coming out and being out are diminished in a social context where gay marriage has gained momentum, and once restrictive environments and institutions, such as the military and Boy Scouts or religious denominations and congregations, as examples, are taking steps towards inclusion. Some students shared incredible coming out experiences with peers and families. Chelsea expressed such relief that coming out to her four best campus friends simultaneously was a non-event. "We were all together and I was just, 'Oh yeah, I'm dating this girl.' And everybody seemed fine."

Coming out in college was fun. I remember telling myself I wasn't going to tell anybody and then I told my best friend, and that, and I was shaking because my best friend is from Texas," recalled Felicia. "But, I ended up telling her and she was like, 'My mom is gay. Don't worry about it,' which was really nice. And then after that it just slowly started coming out to a lot of different people." Her coming out eventually extended beyond her campus community to family, where she met some but not overwhelming resistance. "My parents are still kind of iffy on it. But, that's essentially my entire coming out story."

Yet for students, many of whose lives are just beginning to unfold in important

334

ways, and who remain dependent on communities of origin, the decision or ability to come out may require greater identity self-efficacy. For instance, Mary shared that "I feel a lot more comfortable here than at home in terms of outness. I am out at home but sometimes I just feel kinda [pause] it's not as comfortable as it is here." When asked about the risks associated with coming out to family, Mary explained, "I knew I didn't have anything to be afraid of, my parents are very open-minded people but it was very hard to find a time to bring it up." A visit home provided the in-person interaction that Mary needed to have the all-important conversation with her mom. "I think I told my mom last February and my dad last March. It was hard," she recalled. Even when she was present with her mom, she found it difficult to get the conversation started, and "basically maybe like played 20 questions inadvertently because I was really resistant. I don't know. But it was all okay."

Brett shared that he was "totally disowned by my parents," which makes it hard for him to empathize with students like Mary who struggle to come out to parents who are accepting or who evolve to become accepting. Comparing notes with peers, he often encounters students who share some version of mixed results coming out to parents that are far better than his own. He explained that peers will express "'Oh my parents are, they're accepting. They're just... They're taking some time. I'm really upset that they're taking time to understand me. They should just be totally accepting.' And I'm like, 'Your experience and my experience are very, very different.'" On one hand, Brett is able to be empathetic, but it can also be challenging in the context of his own experience and loss of support.

Tara resists coming out to family in her small town because of the way she has

observed others who were or were perceived to be LGBTQ+ treated. Describing a woman who was perceived as trans, she recalled that "she could not keep a job, even my Dad called her queer and faggot, and it was horrible, or anyone that was obviously not heterosexual or cisgender, they just weren't treated well." Veronica, too, expressed a rocky experience coming out that has slowed her from being fully open in some contexts or open at all in others, despite a nuanced self-understanding of her sexual orientation and gender identity:

> Gender identity-wise, I do identify as a woman, but other times I feel like it changes. And gender expression, I'm definitely more masculine, and I know I've been read that way before. And I guess I could technically identify as queer, because it's an umbrella term, and that's what I've realized, but I have mixed feelings about that word, because I once came out to my boss back home. I'm very close to her. She works at a veterinarian hospital. We've kind of talked to each other for several years now. So I came out finally, and I came out as queer, but then she is a little older, so that was not [pause]. She was okay with LGBTQ, but then that word "queer" is associated with negative connotations, so then whenever I come out now, I don't use that word in case of that negative connotation, or feedback, response.. But then I also sometimes use that word if don't want anyone to know, because I'm, yeah, I'm not completely "out" yet. I identify as Asian and that has always been a struggle for me, because my family is very conservative. They don't have the best view of LGBTQ people.

Landon's experience of coming out as a member of Center-sponsored educational panels has helped provide him with a level of comfort around coming out. "Just talking about it in that way. I've become more confident about just coming out to people, and things like that." Spryte had significant conversations with Center staff as they prepared to seek employment as an asexual, gender non-conforming person entering a strongly heteronormative field. "And I think it did turn some companies off of me, because I showed up in a suit, I'm female bodied, I showed up in a suit, my hair is bright red, I wear two different colored earrings." Yet their preparatory activities prepared them to answer

336

questions directly, to be authentic and confident, and to understand that a work environment had to comport with and support Spryte's own individual expression to allow them to contribute fully as an employee. Spryte felt that their search process was longer and more challenging than that of peers, but a position was ultimately offered and accepted, and Spryte expressed feeling confident that the outcome was the right path for them.

Max discussed his own exploration with transitioning his gender identity and preferred name, and the support and direction that he received through a staff member about this decision to come out as trans:

> And so basically what they were able to do, the first thing he said was, 'Any changes that we make will be completely within the [college systems]. So, anything financial aid-wise for the government that would still stay as your legal name but any name changes otherwise like on Moodle, on attendance list, all of your professors will just see [your preferred] name.' And he said that, 'But the thing that does mean though is that, that's the name that will also get for mail home. So, does your family know?' And so I thought that was cool that he asked about that because I know people who didn't.

Center staff understand that coming out in one context can cause ripples that create risks and opportunities related to openness in others. Helping students think through consequences, and identify and overcome associated challenges is important work and a value that Centers provide.

<div align="center">Advising</div>

The seventh Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that of advising. The following will consider the theme specifically. Advising activities often encompass a formal advising role associated with LGBTQ+-related student organizations, but extend further to the individual advisement of students around

<div align="center">337</div>

curricular and co-curricular choices, as well as personal and professional matters.

Each of the campuses observed had at least one, and often several, student organizations that were grounded in LGBTQ+ identity. These organizations coalesced around one or several primary or secondary goals including: social interactions and LGBTQ+ community development, activism, identity development or intersectionality, professional growth and development, or recreational activities and sports.

Organization advisors meet with groups and group leaders to provide encouragement, support and validation; to help give institutional context and guidance for navigating complex institutional structures, administrative hurdles and expectations, and mitigate risk; and to help further the aims and goals of the group which are often congruent with advisors' own interests, values and desired outcomes. Advisors often bring a perspective of shorter and longer-term strategic planning to their groups. Jordan, who advises an assortment of socially-oriented groups and queer identity collectives, helps leaders to think ahead: "I help support them to think about how's it going? And what do they need to do to keep their organizations going." This advising mindset and regular inquiry helps leaders gain capacity as they anticipate and plan to address shorter- and longer-term needs and obstacles.

Informal advisement of group leaders is just as important. Arica provides Center support and while she has no formal organization advisement role, she often finds herself providing informal advising to leaders of organizations. "They're free to create whatever groups, and run them," she explains. "We're just here for support, advice, or resources, or to tell them, 'Oh, you really should contact such and such for this or that.'" Helping students more easily accomplish their goals by successfully navigating the people and

processes endemic to colleges and universities is a critical support that advisors, both formal and informal bring to the table, especially for student groups whose identity intersections may generate additional or unexpected overt or covert resistance.

Advisors also actively develop their leaders. Providing student leaders with the right balance of autonomy and support can be a challenge, as each student's leadership skill set varies. Kent explained his experience founding an organization for queer athletes and the support he received from his advisor. An initial referral from the LGBT Center directed Kent to Student Activities where he made contact with a staff member there. He describes that he was told, "Okay, this is the website where you can find this. Have fun. Good luck. Write this constitution by yourself," a process which was overwhelming. Kent returned to the Center somewhat dismayed. His advisor pushed him though. Kent recalls that the advisor "helped me through that, too, saying, 'Okay. Well, I like these ideas that you've written down and that you've typed up and sent to me. Here's the things that I think you should add and here's the things that I don't necessarily like or agree with, but it's up to you and it's up to the organization.'" The advisor continued to provide guidance, but also challenged Kent to work at the boundary of his abilities, pushing him to extend, but not exceed, his capacity–individualized support he had not received from Student Activities. He described his interactions with the Center advisor as "definitely more hands-on, but also hands-on in a way that teaches you something. He's not just gonna hand it to you and be like, 'Oh, here's a completed constitution for your organization. Go use it.'" It was up to Kent to think through and finalize his plans with his organization members, and he recognizes both the difficulty and the value of the process for his learning. He recalled with some pride: "They're gonna make you do it yourself. And that's

something I appreciate because I don't like being spoon-fed things." Kent's resilience in the face of challenging and work and institutional obstacles needed to be bolstered by the right support in the right ways at the right times. Feeling encouraged and empowered by his advisor was significant in his successful founding of the organization.

Kenny was an existing leader of an organization that sponsored an annual Drag Pageant. His support needs were different. The logistical elements of the program were the easiest of the dynamics to manage. Kenny's greater challenge was balancing the interpersonal dynamics—managing performer personalities, other organization members, and stakeholder expectations. Kenny explained that "there are times when I am planning things out for the drag show, and we don't agree with each other on something like the number of performers" or more often he would become frustrated upon hearing other students or performers expressing opinions that were highly charged—something that he experienced as "an aggression that bothers me a lot." He gave an example: "sometimes one of the queens will say something, [for example] that they don't feel like kings should be in the show. And that bothers me a lot, because to me that's an aggression of these people who are less than us." It was difficult for Kenny to know how to proceed, and often he would find himself sharing his reactions and responses to these conflicts with his advisor. Kenny explains that the advisor "never forces his opinion on anybody, or if I asked for his opinion, he doesn't say, 'This is what you have to do.' He just says, 'Here's what I would do. Take it or leave it,' as I feel somebody in his position should when dealing with student organizations." Kenny highly valued these perspectives and the alternative ways of moving forward that they provided, often adjusting his own expectations or responses accordingly. Helping him build capacity in managing others

340

and his own emotions was a considerable contribution that his advisor was able to make to his leadership development. He explained that his advisor "has a very rational way of looking at things, that goes along with him being so extremely intelligent" and seeing this as a leadership alternative "has probably been the biggest benefit there," he recalled.

Center staff often use their own experiences having navigated higher education institutions, often through the lens of their own LGBTQ+ identities, to provide informal curricular and professional guidance. Jordan shared that he does "a lot of academic advising in my position, particularly with my student and paid staff. And I do sometimes see that they are either surprised, or don't realize that I know what I know." He often finds himself responding to their surprise at the range of his institutional knowledge by explaining that "I have my Master's and I've been through this before." Indeed, there is power in LGBTQ+ students seeing and hearing from others who embody similar identities, and who have moved through and succeeded in the spaces in which they find themselves presently challenged. Their experience of staff in this way allows them to picture themselves as also accomplished, degreed and successful. Brett articulated this well when they said they enjoyed "not only watching students develop, but also helping direct [students] towards professional experiences or things that might interest them, and watching them see themselves grow up and that there are futures for them."

Other advisors are able to help students create coalitions of identity support. Carlos shared his experience with his advisor, saying that she "opened the whole campus up to me, telling me about professors that are down" or who shared similar backgrounds, experiences and interests. He went on to explain that "she knows the importance of having someone of your similar background, and how important that is to see yourself

341

reflected." His advisor helped him identify and connect with faculty members who were academically compatible and identity supportive. "So she's like, 'Professor B., he's a professor in Sociology,' when she found out I was a sociology major, and she's like, 'He's settled down with his wife, Professor R., she's in ethnic studies,'" Carlos appreciated his advisor's willingness to help him network by "telling me the instructors who I could approach, who are approachable." Providing these kinds of informal endorsements gave Carlos the courage and permission to expand his campus network of support quickly and broadly. Because he established these connections early on, he was able to maximize other aspects of his involvement and ultimately became more quickly connected to his major and the experiences that would further his professional goals and interests.

Students may also feel more comfortable opening up to and sharing with someone who allows them to be fully authentic and whole in their identity. Craig described the relationship as one of mentorship. "I tell [my Center director] a lot of information about my personal life and he gives me his advice and I feel like I know a decent amount about [their] personal life that we have a good rapport between us." The advisement that takes place between them extends beyond academic matters to include relationships and personal matters, all of which may ultimately affect classroom performance and student persistence.

<div align="center">Leadership Development</div>

The seventh Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that of leadership development. The following will consider the theme specifically. LGBTQ+ people may feel disinclined to engage in leadership activities or institutions because of perceptions that existing leaders and leadership institutions have historically,

and presently continue to actively work towards LGBTQ+ marginalization. For example, through their formative years, students have experienced efforts to enshrine the Constitution of the United States with language restricting marriage equality, and to successful efforts to accomplish the same in a majority of state constitutions. They have witnessed faith leaders calling from the pulpit for the social exclusion of LGBTQ+ people, and otherwise using clerical leadership voices to creating barriers within and among families and communities, and to encourage, incite or affirm violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. In their schools, they have seen trusted teachers and administrators witness acts of LGBTQ+ intolerance, harassment and violence, while failing to respond, protect or defend, to any degree, the targets of sexual or gender identity-based resistance; rather educational leaders have been complicit or instigators of these exclusions, demanding that students conform to heteronormative assumptions and expression to participate in the educational enterprise or co-curricular experiences. And even in their daily lives, traditional social models such as doctors and police officers, have served to actively and passively resist marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities, by assumption, microaggression or acting as perpetrators of emotional disenfranchisement and physical violence.

As LGBTQ+ students have experienced leadership as manifest through these institutions, they may wonder why they would be persuaded to participate in and perpetuate systems that are experienced as emotionally and physically harmful, detrimental and exhausting. Yet developing leadership capacity and skills within and among LGBTQ+ identified students has never been more critical as opportunities to dismantle heteronormative, binary and cisgendered systems of hegemony and oppression

343

become more viable. An informed, skilled and prepared cohort of LGBTQ+ leaders is required to contribute to acts and activities of advocacy and democratic citizenship to further social change and progressive progress. Such leadership is evident in the work of Center staff and directors, community activists and social change agents, and the everyday heroism embodied by people who live their lives out and proud, openly and authentically, creating change and inclusive environments in whatever spaces of work, social and cultural influence they encounter.

Students often engage in early leadership development by participating in social and advocacy organizations related to LGBTQ+ identity, and are often advised by or otherwise connected in these roles to Centers and Center staff. Gay-Straight Alliance, Queer Union, and Rainbow Advocates are all examples of groups that work to foster community and interaction among and between LGBTQ+ people and allies, to create opportunities for students to explore and develop identity understandings, to normalize and provide for queer-friendly and affirming spaces, and to advocate for inclusion. Other groups may intersect identity with other interests or passions–LGBT club sports or professional organizations, for instance–or offer particular cohorts opportunities to undertake more specific community work–as in the experience of identity collectives, QPOC groups or LGBTQ+ faith communities.

As officers and members of these student clubs and organizations, students gain a range of organizational and leadership skills that create personal capacity and further the group's goals. While particular skill developments are articulated at length in the following chapter, participants reflected on any number of ways that involvement as LGBTQ+ leaders was beneficial. Lindsey shared, "they gave me a lot of concrete skills

on how to facilitate and how to be a leader, and how to deal with inter-community conflict." Shannon took some time before articulating her growth, prefacing her comments with a disclaimer. "I feel like I've definitely grown as a leader [although] I still don't even really know what that means." Yet she recalled, "I feel like I've learned how to be a better collaborator, through working with people who are very humble and very motivated and very passionate about the different issues that they care about," she paused reflectively, searching for the right expression. "It sort of motivated me to be a better speaker as well, and to learn how to clearly and coherently communicate what I want to express." Max referenced gaining networking skills, while Sam talked about dealing with difficult co-leaders and finding common ground from which to work. Take-aways and particular skills developed varied widely between and among leaders, but these participations were significant in their outcomes, and developed students involved as LGBTQ+ leaders.

Beyond the internal development of leaders, Centers facilitate coalition work and the development of community collaboratives that foster social change and model inclusive practices of leadership that students might expect and encounter as they show leadership moving forward. Describing a multi-campus LGBTQ+ collaborative that assembled students from various campuses co-located within an urban center for a traditional summit, Jordan explained that "students here, the queer students here, really need to interact with other queer students that are coming from different demographics in different areas of the country." Facilitating these interactions helps students get beyond familiar embodiments of identity that the campus readily sustains, "to really get a sense of what does queer mean on a national scale, not just from their experience here at [my

345

institution]." Hector was a very verbal and descriptive participant, never lacking for words to describe how he experienced the world as an LGBTQ+ person or a student at his institution. Yet as a recent participant in one of these community summits, he described the impact that the opportunity to share his identity in this group context offered him. "So sharing our stories was very important for me. Because I realized it's a way to, so how to effectively share your story without going very deep into so many things, because there's, there's so little, sometimes, the time." Because of constraints, Hector was pressed to distill essential aspects and experiences that best conveyed his identity to other participants, which provided some challenge. "That was very helpful for me to think of ways to condense my story and to really show what I really cared [about]. Like it was a way for me to learn about myself and know what I cared about, when talking about my identity." This was reflective and powerful for Hector, and created a space of personal development that might not have been motivated on his campus alone.

Social change is a collaborative effort often best accomplished by organizations and institutions working together. This requires story-telling, empathy, relationship building and communication along with strategic planning and implementation across groups. The coalition work that students experience as groups work together within institutions and across institutions is critical to creating foundational leadership experiences upon which students will build their futures. To wit, Sheryl described an experience with an alumni on her campus who articulated the value-added endemic in student employment recruits whose leadership skills and cultural competencies had been fostered in addition to curricular achievement:

Fairly recently we had a panel of corporate executives who came to talk about the

importance of students with the people who've had companies that recruit heavily from this campus, and then their whole thesis was you would be a better employee, have greater opportunities for leadership, if you've developed cultural competencies here. And I heard one of these folks say, "Now, I'm not saying that you won't get employed at our company, but if you don't understand how to work with, deal with people that are different, you're not gonna make it to leadership. Because that's what we have to have in order to be successful." So, if this is part of what it's gonna mean for these students to be successful, I believe that many of the issues that they're gonna face in their life in terms of what they pay taxes about, what they're gonna vote about are gonna be at their root diversity inclusion issues. Whether we're talking about what's gonna happen with all these baby boomers, undocumented students, same gender marriages, the widening gap between the have and have not, this has all got to do, the collapse of the middle class, these are all diversity and inclusion issues.

As Sheryl relates, having both an inclusive world-view and leadership skills alongside the classroom learning and development that prepares students for a particular set of work tasks or responsibilities transforms students' personal marketability from simple employment eligibility to the potential for significant organizational advancement. This positioning represents a student's social and workplace mobility, and the ability of a student to take advantage of the full capacity that a college degree has to offer. Chelsea sums up her leadership experience and its career relatability when she says, "the connections I've made through the LGBTQ community, specifically like the Alliance and the Center [staff], have shaped my entire–where I wanna go after school, and what I'm doing now in school, and the success that I'm having." Likewise, Max plans to leverage his interactions with queer-identified alumni with whom he has networked as he furthers his own career preparations in education. "Just to know I have that network available for something I'm gonna look into probably more this summer," is invaluable to him. As a trans person, he really sees value in learning from those who have gone before him. "I'm going into my senior year and trying to find if there are queer alums who work in

education, to talk with them about that."

Creating space and opportunity for students to explore their leadership skills and potentials is truly critical as a Center activity and outcome. Supporting clubs and organizations that intersect with LGBTQ+ identity fosters identity development and furthers social transformation. Individual student skill sets and capacities are developed around leadership, and social roles that seem uninteresting or off-limits to individual students may begin to show more appeal. Finally, leadership development creates opportunities for students to succeed and excel in their chosen paths beyond degree attainment.

<center>Providing Information, Referral and Resources</center>

The final Center activity or practice to emerge from the data as a theme was that of providing information, referral and resources. The following will consider the theme specifically. An important role of Centers is to share information, to give referral to other campus and community services, and house and disseminate resources of importance to LGBTQ+ people. Centers depend on partnerships and collaborations to meet the varied needs of students and constituents because those needs often extend beyond the training, specialization and expertise of existing staff, because the volume of support demands exceed Center capacity to keep up without assistance, and because engaging others in the support enterprise fosters broader investment in outcomes related to LGBTQ+ student success.

Because LGBTQ+ people have often encountered identity resistance, and been subject to social meta-narratives that have engaged in misinformation about LGBTQ+ existence and experience to reinforce existing social structures and further marginalize

<center>348</center>

those with minority sexual orientations and gender identities, LGBTQ+ people are wary of the veracity of information that pertains to them, or upon which they depend to make informed decisions. Often, LGBTQ+ people turn to institutions that specifically serve and support them to gather information they need. Centers must often provide a broad spectrum of information and resources, vetted for truth-value, and reflecting topics directly related to wellness aspects of identity, such as health, sexual health, and normalcy, to those related to identity advocacy, informing of local, regional and national action around political and legal intersections of identity, and finally to topics only tangentially connected to identity, such as those related to experiences or processes of course or major selection, or the ways that students navigate classroom and out-of-classroom environments. Students rely on Center staff to help connect them to answers because of the existing trusting relationships that have been developed, and because staff can help answer those questions through a lens that attends to LGBTQ+ experiences.

Jade who serves in a student staff role in her Center, talks about the importance of students being able to "come in here and talk about queer sex or something like that. Where else are students gonna feel comfortable doing that on campus?" She further highlights the critical role and input of staff in the space as she continues, "especially within a space where people might actually have some knowledge to actually direct them towards some stuff. You'll be like, 'Hey, well maybe that's not the safest practice.' To have that space is so important." Jade points out the value that staff can add to the interaction in providing information and context. As students explore the landscape of their individual identities, and engage in intimacies that reflect them, having an accepting space to discuss their experiences is critical. Further, Center staff can be skilled in

challenging specific aspects of students' decisions, such as choices that put their safety or wellness at risk, without moralizing or judging the particular behavior as non-normative, socially unacceptable or otherwise distasteful.

Information and resources are available from materials that are gathered in the Center, from Center staff who serve as mentors and advisors, but also from peers who provide critical reflection and engage with one another in conversation. Eric described well these important layers of support, predicting that when "students come in, they know that they're going to find staff there, they know that they're going to find peer support as well, and that's a big part of community development." Working through issues raised in a conversational collective allows for crowd-sourcing of knowledge and problem-solving of decisions. He continues, "if a student shows up, there's going to be other people there, and so they will find some layer of support and community in our LGBTQ Center. And that space offers some semblance of privacy and some semblance of confidentiality"

Trevor reflected on his experience as a graduate student and Center staff member drawing on several years of experience meeting with and helping students talk through their problems as they find solutions or ways to make progress. "It's not really counseling. I'm not really a counselor, but many times, it does take the form of counseling, or at least, referral. Listening and referral. A lot of the Center is listening and referral." One of those opportunities for listening and referral was described by Jade. She describes a student who presented at the Center seeking assistance from staff: "He had been obviously drinking, and I think that, what I was sensing from my interaction was that he was kind of struggling with his identity, in being open about his identity, or figuring out his identity." Staff identified through conversation that the student's identity

struggles had been mitigated by self-medication through use of alcohol and other drugs. His lack of self acceptance, as Jade explains, was "playing into him having those behaviors like coming to school very drunk or on drugs and stuff like that." Center staff began to share information with the student to help normalize his identity experience, to provide him with supports and peers who could relate to his journey, and help connect him to counseling and other campus support services that might address some of his substance use. Jade relates that this was complex and challenging work, "trying to kind of navigate that when somebody's not being completely … Maybe they don't know why they're having those issues or they just don't want to be completely upfront with that." Center staff have to carefully navigate a tightrope that balances what students are prepared to admit and explore, and what they are actively working to contain and resist. Jade explains that it is ultimately the challenge of "trying to get them to talk to you without pushing them too much."

Yet Center staff provide supports that are broadly constituted. Spryte describes seeking help in articulating their involvement in LGBTQ+ organizations and advocacy on a resume focused on engineering positions. Spryte explained that "normally, the advice for engineers is 'just hide it. Hide it and just deal with it,'" but Spryte felt that doing so was inauthentic. In talking with Center staff about how to proceed, the staff was honest with Spryte, explaining that being out in the job search process might restrict potential interviews and offers from more conservative firms or hiring managers. Rather, Spryte was coached by Center staff in a different direction. They explained, "instead of hiding it, spin it. And it's not lying, because I'm going to work with [youth advocacy]." The Center was affirming but realistic through this complicated and challenging process, something

351

that Spryte appreciated. "I'm sure there's some people who have torn my resume up because they saw I'm part of a gay organization, but [Center staff] didn't tell me to take it off. They just gave me the realistic point of view." Helping Spryte understand and make good choices about how they will actually encounter the world as an LGBTQ+ professional was a critical support.

Similarly, Jordan describes helping students with information that falls outside of the Center specialization of identity development and support, when he talks about being called upon to engage in academic advising. "I would say I do a lot of academic advising in my position, particularly with my student and paid staff. And I do sometimes see like, they are either surprised or don't realize that I know what I know." Decisions related to academic courses and course choices are common to all students, but LGBTQ+ students may have a variety of needs and anxieties that uniquely relate. For instance, LGBTQ+ students may question the degree to which they can be authentic to their sexual or gender identity and also embody a particular career path. They may be motivated or inspired to do social change work or choose a major based on the ways that they understand its potential to influence or further LGBTQ+ inclusion or advocacy goals. Or they may be seeking information about the degree to which particular faculty or classroom spaces are more or less conducive to their persistence and success, or how they might engage with peers or others to overcome marginalization or foster tolerance.

Ale shared an example, saying, "it happens a lot when people sometimes will just come in and talk about their experiences in the classrooms and whoever's here will hear what they have to say, and then encourage them … to speak up and to express their opinions." The informal interaction she describes provides students with information and

resources to guide their thinking and their choices. It also activates and empowers students to develop and employ skills and strategies that can make them more successful. She goes on to share that a Center visitor described a situation where a peer had made remarks such that people who shared the visitor's identity should not be present at the school. After much discussion and processing, Ale shares that "we gave her a pamphlet and we gave her a little poster of when all of our events were for that month, and she said, 'Thank you.' She's like, 'I'm gonna bring it up in class next time.'" The student left and Ale wondered whether and how their conversation had been successful. Often in these cases, Center staff may never hear of the efficacy of their work with students. Yet this student returned after a few weeks. Ale tells the rest of the story, "she talked about it in class and she specifically gave the postcard to the person who had made that comment for them to come to the events and I was like, 'That's really great.'" In this case, providing information and resources resulted in the student being able to stand up for herself and resist an environment that was hostile to her. For the student, and for Ale, this act of education and resistance was impactful. With a big smile, Ale confirms, "I was happy because I felt like we encouraged her to take action in school."

Regardless of the topic, among LGBTQ+-identified students, Centers serve a critical role of providing information, resources and referrals, and substantiating the veracity of additional campus spaces of support. Sheryl, the person who oversees operations and outcomes of all identity centers on her campus, describes the LGBTQ Center and staff pretty simply along these lines. "People know [the Director] as a go-to. They know the Center as a go-to." Ale affirms the way her Center acts in this regard, sharing, "students who come in with LGBTQ related [health] issues will, I think for the

353

most part, come in here first, and then we refer them to someone at, [for instance,] the health center." With regards to health care and counseling services on campus and in the community, Center staff can provide students with a level of comfort that the people and resources that they encounter in these campus spaces through Center referral are trustworthy, reliable, and act as allies to the community. These acts of referral can be quite meaningful to students who have experienced marginalization grounded in their sexual or gender identities, about whom assumptions have been made, or whose care has been compromised or dismissed by providers in the past.

Conclusion

Based on the experiences and observations of Center staff and users that LGBT Centers provide considerable value to students and their campuses through activities and practices described by nine themes: Advocacy; ally development; fostering visibility; assessment; developing LGBTQ+ community and counterspace; specialized expertise; advising; leadership development; and providing information, referral and resources.

As it relates to the many ways that Centers provide essential value for institutions and individuals they serve, Jordan posited, "people who regularly interact with our services and offices, recognize how important and pivotal we are to their success here. Even if they're not completely, fully aware of all the ways in which we do impact them." Sheryl, as a champion for identity centers across campus that serve various cohort needs, recognized the essential value that they provide for students whose identities are accompanied by institutionalized barriers, and the burden of responsibility that institutions have to ameliorate the ways that they serve to obstruct student progress:

I don't think there's anything I'd say that we can't, that we should not do, because

for a student, a faculty member, or a staff member who needs that safe space and encouragement, and I don't care what dimension of diversity inclusion we're talking about, those spaces need to be there.

For Brett, on his campus, that institutional support is evident. "It's very much like, 'Oh, we didn't realize we didn't have that. How do we get it? What do you suggest?' And that was really shocking, when I first got here, because that was not the response I was expecting." Brett has been able to make recommendations for change and help guide them into existence "which is good. I think it makes for a much more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQ students."

Approaching graduation in just a few months, Jade is reflective on her role with the Center and experiences on campus as an LGBTQ+ advocate:

> I don't know what I'm gonna do once I graduate…. Because the sense of community that you have here, working with and being surrounded by students who are interested in social justice and creating safe spaces and stuff like that, it's very much an experience that... It's really hard to find. And when you're on a college campus, you're so privileged to have a lot of those spaces, at least on this campus. And so that's something that I'm definitely gonna be, when I graduate, whenever that is. It's going to be a big shock for me.

CHAPTER VII

THE CENTER'S ROLE IN DEVELOPING CRITICAL SKILLS

It has already been argued that LGBT Centers provide considerable value to

students and their campuses through activities and practices of advising and leadership

development, advocacy, ally development, provision of information, referral and

resources, and assessment, as well as the ways that the create critical visibility for

LGBTQ+ people on campus, create and develop community and counterspace, and

provide specialized expertise around LGBTQ+ theory, practice and identity development.

Yet beyond those activities specifically related to LGBTQ+ identity and the support of

those marginalized based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Centers contribute

significantly to the development of capacities and skills in students that transcend identity

work and development.

In particular, participants articulated how Center involvements helped them

develop other important skills and capacities. These skills and capacities are articulated

through three themes that open coding of the data revealed. Open coding, a process

described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) of carefully parsing and disaggregating the data

such that similarities and differences might be drawn out, was used across interview

transcripts to determine critical connections and meanings through the linkages of

common experience, and similar participant understanding. The three themes that

emerged from this process of open coding described skills and capacities critical to

students success that exceeded the reach and scope of identity work: Fostering professionalism; developing resilience; and cultivating a social justice lens. The following will briefly expand on the three individual themes and then consider them individually along with their sub-themes.

The data revealed three themes related to skills and capacities gained by students through Center involvement. First, participants discussed ways that Center participation fostered professionalism and the ability to work with others in productivity environments. Participants also explored the development of resilience, or strategies that they employ to overcome obstacles to their achievement of desired goals and outcomes. Finally, participants discussed the ways Center involvement cultivated a social justice lens, which participants used to buffer, interpret and understand encounters and interactions with other individuals and experiences of the world. Each of these important skill sets will be discussed individually in the chapter that follows.

Fostering Professionalism

The first skill or capacity revealed in the data as a theme was that of fostering professionalism, and six sub-themes became evident: Communicating effectively; working in teams and managing others; solving problems; planning programs; thinking strategically and managing change; and practicing advocacy within organizational constraints and understanding hierarchies. The following will consider the theme broadly and then differentiate and discuss each sub-theme. Spaces created by Centers, both the physical space that they occupy, as well as the psychic space embodied in their communities, organizations, programs and activities are most often interactive group spaces. Even a person's identity, work marked and measured by individual progress, is

produced through conversation, exploration and mentorship that is only rarely isolated or

solitary. In these group spaces, individuals encounter themselves and others, and ideas

that support and challenge their existing frameworks of understanding. They often seek to

make change to themselves and their environments through organized group efforts and

initiatives. Much of this work requires combined endeavors that emerge from work and

organizational teams, formal and informal groups, and coalitions and collaborations

derived from interest convergence.

The sorts of skills derived from these experiences that participants described

gaining included: communication; teamwork and managing others; problem solving;

program planning; strategic thinking and change management; and practicing advocacy

within organizational constraints and hierarchies. The following pages will consider each

of these professionalism skills as participants described the Center-related involvements

that helped develop them.

Communicating Effectively

As the ability to convey information accurately and successfully, to be strategic

with message and audience, and to argue effectively and persuade others, communication

skills are essential to the success of people in modern life. Interview participants

overwhelmingly noted that Center experiences and interactions helped them to develop,

apply and hone their interpersonal communication capacity.

Serving in positions that require bringing others together and making progress

around shared concerns provides students with opportunities to develop communication

skills. As a Co-chair of an LGBT student organization, Sam referenced that "talking

about issues, and group discussions about issues, and how to navigate those has been

really helpful" Chelsea's leadership also afforded her the opportunity to work on a search committee. "Just this week, I'm speaking to provosts and trying to figure out what this candidates, how these candidates, feel about the LGBT community," she disclosed, adding that her Center involvement has "opened me up to a lot of different opportunities that I didn't think necessarily I would be able to access."

Intentional development around strategic communication takes place as students are prepared to represent the Center across the campus and share their experiences as faces and voices of the LGBTQ+ community. "He'll talk to them about how do you want to present your perspective, how do you want to talk about this?" explained Sheryl, referring to the training curriculum that prepares students as members of educational panels invited to explore and explain LGBTQ+ basics in classrooms and meetings throughout the year. "He works with them and prompts them to do it in an effective way because what you want is results, and so you want to organize how you're gonna present information in ways that are gonna get your points across." Kent is a frequent panelist, and directly attributed capacity gains around communication to his Center experiences:

> I definitely was not this well-spoken when I first got here, I wouldn't consider myself as well-spoken to some of my friends. I try hard, I try to keep up, and feel like that's definitely due to the Center. The way I go about talking about myself, and I try not to use generalizations, like "we" – "we think," "we feel." I try to definitely just talk about myself and my personal experiences, occasionally bringing experiences that I've had with friends who maybe don't view it the same way I do, but how I view them talking about their experience to me and how that changed my perspective. The Center has definitely taught me to relax a little bit more and not be so nervous about talking about myself, and talking about my experiences.

Many other student panelists shared similar observations of their growth. "It helps me develop my ability to verbalize things. And a lot of times we get repetitive questions,

but occasionally there will be a question that I'm just not expecting," shared Skye. "and it really puts me on the spot and helps me figure out, how do I concisely and effectively convey a message about something that's maybe really complicated in a time frame." Faith agreed, stating similarly, "it's cool because you get to be real kind of spontaneous and off the cuff…. There's a genuineness and an authenticity about the exchange that I think is probably more enlightening than something that's more packaged and formal." Both Skye and Faith are creating communication strategies and personas that are thoughtful and inviting, and that are honest but persuasive. They are embodying communication as a means and an end, and showing that they understand it as strategic and intentional.

Ale conveyed becoming a more confident, prepared communicator. "I was told to watch out, that some people will sort of make comments in front of the whole class. And so I got nervous." Concerned that she might not be able to draw out an effective response in the time required to confront and diminish the impact of a critical comment, she worried that "I'm either gonna get really angry or I'm gonna cry and it's gonna be embarrassing either way." Her experience as a panelist, however, has reinforced that she does have the skills to think quickly and respond effectively, even though the support that she receives for her participation from thankful students overwhelms any negative feedback or sentiment expressed. Despite having taken part in more than several of these educational presentations, she admits she still feels anxious as she approaches another one "because every time we go into those classrooms, it's like we're coming out all over again. I mean, not necessarily in the same sense," as coming out the first time, or to people who are deeply valued and valuable in one's life, she admitted, "but it definitely

360

does make me feel a little shaky, like I do get nervous still, because you really never

know what anyone is gonna say."

Seeing communication modeled by others was influential for Shannon, as she

observed peers who were "very motivated and very passionate about the different issues

that they care about, it sort of motivated me to be a better speaker as well and to learn

how to clearly and coherently communicate what I want to express," and the same was

true for Trevor who expressed that he "definitely learned a lot about public speaking just

through the experience" of participating in panels and facilitating discussions in the

Center.

Other students articulated that the development of communication skills and

strategies were driven by identity needs, but also fostered through interactions with the

Center and Center staff. Andi, who is a transitioning transwoman, focused on

assertiveness aspects of communication that she had gained as she confronted resistance

to the use of her preferred pronouns, or "in public when I represent a female and they

called me "he" in situations." She went on to explain:

> So, I came to [the Center] to talk about how I can push people to use "she"
> without being too overtly aggressive, and that I had problems being called a man
> by my roommate multiple times. And being called straight because I like women
> multiple times…. I talked to [Center staff] and they helped me through how I can
> process it, and what I can do to remedy that situation. Which, for the specific
> person was basically just I had to like basically just lay down the law with him,
> but like other people where I can be nice to, [Center staff helped] me do it in a
> nice [pause] in a way that I'm not going to come off as really bitchy, but
> sometimes you have to be bitchy, right?

The interactions that Center staff had with Andi focused on strategic communication, and

how to best persuade others to accommodate her pronoun preferences, or act assertively

in cases where her requests were not honored. Gains in communication skills were

bolstered by gains in confidence, and Andi shared feeling somewhat transformed. "A year ago, I would've barely talked to a person at a fast food counter, but now that I'm trans, I have to deal with a bunch of shit that I don't" she paused, sighing, her expression apologizing for the crass language, but also affirming its utter appropriateness before she continued, "I shouldn't have to deal with, and so I have to raise hell about it. [laughter] And so, I went up there and talked and like affirmed my position as who I am and what I need done." Communication skills have translated to success in Andi's work, as well. As staff in the Center, Andi now provides the same sort of development for others that she experienced herself. Even when students present with particularly sensitive situations, Andi explained, "I have gotten a lot more comfortable with that, in being able to like sit down and listen and talk to somebody and be an ear, and get them the help that they're wanting and needing in that moment."

Through intentional efforts to foster skill development, inclusion of students in Center programs and activities, and by helping students to master skills that they need to embody developing identities, Centers foster gains in communication skills and abilities.

Working in Teams and Managing Others

Many participants talked about gathering skills around people work as they collaborated toward shared goals. Jade recalled working with someone who had a very different approach to many aspects of the process than she brought herself:

> We worked on an event for the first time [together] and seeing the different ways that we go about planning an event and looking at it conceptually. Because I'm just the kind that's, 'Let's get through this.' And she's like [pause] she takes her process a lot slower and she has much more of a passive facilitation approach than I do. I'm much more of a lecturer, so I think that finding that balance and finding, like okay what's the most effective way to get this information across?

362

Jade noted that she was dominant in the planning process, but that her co-programmer had much to offer, and an important perspective to contribute. She took intentional measures to draw out her peer, saying at one point to her, "You know what? If I'm being too pushy, you need to say it back, I want you to feel comfortable telling me that." They were able to gain capacity together, and the experience created opportunities for Jade to better understand herself and how she is perceived – "I have a very strong personality" she admitted – in group contexts.

Others acknowledged critical partnerships that facilitated teamwork and personal and professional growth. Marcus discussed a student staff member that he hired that has become an essential team member. "I attribute a lot of what we've done to the hiring of one student, in particular," he shared. "She and I had a lot of conversations about things that helped me grow, and I think together we were able to figure out how to help the Center grow." As a team, they identified the need to incorporate more intersectionality into Center offerings, to address aspects of white privilege in safe zone trainings, and to seek diversity in future staff hirings such that the Center might be perceived as more welcoming to QPOC students.

Carlos saw his perspective continually enhanced through his observations of and work with fellow programmers in the Center. "We're all connected," he shared with some pride. "An art major like [M], she's phenomenal in bringing art into speaking about movements. And then you'll have someone like [T], who they go hard on the panels." Carlos was able to identify opportunities to connect with and learn from all of his peer programmers, and to help them shape Center offerings to reflect their own interests and identities as they contributed to the team's work. "You have [G] who's in the sciences

and brings in a science perspective to LGBT," he continued, "so it's a great learning for me too, and just like seeing all these like great ideas helps me grow as well."

Shannon's experience with her team was equally developing, and she expressed that "I feel like I've learned how to be a better collaborator. And also through that, through working with people who are very humble and very motivated and very passionate about the different issues that they care about."

Yet some growth was borne of conflict, as well. Sam described "communication challenges with people running [his LGBT] organization, like co-chairs." After a number of initiatives fell flat because there was little follow-through and the division of labor among leaders felt burdensome, Sam spent time reflecting with his Center advisor about "managing work among co-chairs when one is not doing anything, and things like that." He was able to gather ideas and strategies for moving the group and its goals forward even in the face of leadership challenge. He also gained capacity around interpersonal dynamics and group politics, such as "Not making [leadership conflicts] come through when you have group meetings, and they're people that you're not on good terms with."

With personal growth and skill development fostered by experiences both positive and negative, Centers helped their users to develop critical skills around collaborative work and team efforts.

Solving Problems

Students also gain experiences solving problems and overcoming obstacles through their work with the Center. Providing leadership for Center activities provides many opportunities for Marcus to confront new challenges. When he was asked to recall skills he developed, he remarked, "I think I kind of learned how to keep things afloat.

That's what I really tried to do in my first year, was just keep things afloat." Jade

described managing Center staff as an experience that provided her with opportunity to

solve problems. "It was just like 'Oh. Well what are we going to do? We have finals?

There's nobody in the Center!'" Responding to staff absences, anticipating use patterns

and needs, and keeping the space open and available was "stressful" and "very

consuming. But I think, like I said, I think we made it work, and I think that for me, it

built a lot of skills."

Addressing the needs of Center staff and users was another area that presented

opportunities for problem solving. Marcus and Jade both described responding to

perceptions that the Center's activities needed address intersectionality, both catering

more to the needs of Queer People of Color, but also providing education and outreach on

privilege. After discussing the need for change with Jade, Marcus developed a curriculum

around social justice and privilege that could be woven into staff training activities. "He

ran with that over the winter and he came up with this program" recalled Jade. With some

refinement based on feedback and experience, the white privilege training has since

become a core element of ally development activities that the Center sponsors.

A campus blood drive came to G's attention, when gay and bisexual men

complained that they were excluded from the event based on federal regulations on the

collection of blood and perceptions of HIV risk factors and gay male sexual behavior. "I

think donating blood is a great thing, but it's not the school's fault that they happen to

have those rules on there," she explained. Yet unjustly, gay and bisexual men were either

restricted from participation based on identity or were forced to misrepresent their

identity or activities to participate, and allies were made to feel complicit in supporting

the restrictive and stigmatizing federal policy to contribute to the greater good served by blood donation. "So, that kind of puts us in an awkward spot like, what do we do? Do we try to create a national change because of this?" she asked. "It's national, federal…. I know that we're not the only Center that probably experiences this, but it's just kind of like... we don't have the power." For G the solution came in finding a way for gay and bisexual men to contribute while still honoring the legal restriction. These students were encouraged to find a friend or sponsor, and bring that donor to the blood drive as a person who could stand in for them and represent their willingness to contribute to the cause. It was a solution designed to reduce stigma and make a statement, and also served to symbolize how the policy was unnecessarily limiting valuable blood donations.

Planning Programs

As for G with her approach to the blood drive, much of the problem solving that students gained was centered on solutions that incorporated educational programs and activities. The process of planning and implementing these educational and social experiences became a skill development outcome of its own.

Coordinating and planning for meetings and conversations was a way that Lindsey, who coordinated a discussion group for LGBTQ+ women discovered. "It was very intimate and nice and small and we had really great intentional discussion," during her first year of involvement, "and then moving onto this year, we just had hordes of first years and sophomores starting to come. So, we've had meetings where as many as 35 to 39 people show up and that's huge." Navigating the difference between the way a discussion occurs in an intimate group versus a group of three dozen required a different approach than that which had served the group previously.

366

Marcus discussed learning a number of things partnering with the Greek Council on a Divas of Diversity Drag Show. In addition to general programming lessons associated with groups who put on large-scale events, and the logistics to be coordinated and the ways that both groups needed to be active parts of decision-making processes, the show's content provided an unexpected and previously unencountered obstacle. "Someone in the committee found a news article about the Divas of Diversity show, somewhere at a different college where one of the queens went out there and said the R-word and a bunch of other like classless stuff." Because one of the messages that the show was promoting was about the value of inclusion and respect, the organizers wanted to make sure that the mistake wasn't repeated at their institution. Marcus initiated a conversation with the manager and set some ground rule for the performers. "In light of the fact that it is supposed to be Divas of Diversity, and we're supposed to be talking about this stuff, that was just, it was really frightening for us." But the communication strategy worked, and the show was highly successful, with the inclusion message foremost, and nothing to distract from it. "It went really well," Marcus shared. "I only caught the end of it because I had class. But yeah, we had people talking. We still have! People were asking us this year, 'So, are they coming back?'"

Science with Pride was the subject of an offering that G put together to explore LGBTQ+ identities of scientists and researchers because she was able to gather so little information to support her own understanding of herself as a LGBTQ+ science major. "It has to do with the lack of visibility in the sciences, and how I did my research and I can't really find a lot of open LGBT scientists." She utilized skills related to logistics, but also research, planning, communication, promotion and public speaking to create a panel of

experts who could address the convergence of passion and identity:

> It seemed like there was not a lot out there. So I took that and I took my experience and I put it together into a program where I had a panel of six people. They ranged from undergrad to grad student and a professional. I brought in a professor from LA, and she was a transwoman. And I pretty much asked them questions in front of an audience. And I asked them questions about like the visibility in the sciences, and how it's like to be an LGBT student, does it even matter being an LGBT student in the sciences? Because it's very well-known that it's your studies first, everything else comes second. So your identities don't really get developed as they do within the social sciences or what have you.

Meeting all of the intended outcomes, G felt really good to be able to create something that addressed an invisibility and created space for LGBTQ+ peers. "This is important because we need role models to be able to influence other LGBT students that are coming into the sciences, or that might not think that it's for them because they don't see any other gays."

Thinking Strategically and Managing Change

The Science with Pride panel that G put together reflected her interest in the sciences, but it was also a strategic effort that drew on observations that LGBTQ+ majors in the sciences weren't having the same opportunities to explore and express their identity growth and development through the curriculum in the ways that other majors can. Seeing and seizing on opportunities that move forward Center goals and LGBTQ+ inclusion may be fostered by Center participation, but the application of strategic thinking and change management practices is a skill that can be applied in a variety of additional contexts for students who have exposure to and experience with them.

Beyond meeting some broad intersectional goals, adding to the Center's program offerings and attending to intersectionality, G employed strategic thinking when she issued a personal invitation to attend the event to the Chair of her science department. "I

368

was hoping that it would spark some interest within faculty members or staff members to be like 'Maybe we should learn how to be more inclusive.'" G was pleased and surprised to see this faculty leader in attendance, and she recalled "She didn't stay for the whole time, but she was there. I ran into her probably like two weeks after and I talked to her about it, and she said that it was interesting." G showed endearing amusement as she recounted that this faculty member struggled to describe an interest in becoming an ally, asking instead how she might become a "friend." Capitalizing on the interest, G "told her that she can become an ally by being safe zone-trained. So I explained that to her, and she said that yeah, that she's interested." Still planning, G framed how she would proceed. "What I'm gonna do is, I'm gonna email her during the summer, and I'm gonna see if I can get her and maybe some faculty members and staff members as well to get together and have a safe zone training."

G has taken what might have been a single stand-alone programming event exploring LGBTQ+ identity in the sciences, and strategically leveraged it to cultivate support among faculty in an area of the institution where identity and curriculum rarely intersect. Her careful, thoughtful and personal approach inspired the Chair of her department to show support to G, a student she connects with, but also then to commit to growing her skill set around attending to the needs of future LGBTQ+ students through possible safe zone participation.

Megan's strategic thinking was highlighted as she discussed coming out to her campus supervisor, someone she describes as "an older male, and he just is very traditional." Through a year of working with this person, Megan began to feel constrained in her ability to be open about the important details of her life, including her

live-in partner. Her interest in coming out wasn't a crisis or driven by circumstance, but was rather a way of living more authentically and honestly. "So it was kind of weird for me to have to tell him," she shared, and her goal was to minimize any awkwardness or fallout. She spent a considerable amount of time considering how to best disclose the personal detail of her sexual orientation in this work context. Rather than requesting a meeting, or conducting the conversation in a sit-down formal context, Megan decided to share it more casually.

She explained that "if you just kind of throw it out in a conversation like it's not a big deal, then most of the time the person that you're talking to is gonna take it like it's not a big deal." Rather than telegraphing distress by initiating an unusual contact, she talked about her partner by name during a standard interaction. She was nervous but pleasantly surprised when her disclosure was met more warmly than she anticipated. "My boss didn't care. It was weird to tell him but he didn't care," she recalled. In this case, the ultimately affirming reaction of Megan's supervisor is less important than her deep consideration of the ways and opportunities to come out, and her choice to be particularly intentional and strategic about her plan.

Marcus worked with Center programmers to make a change around what had become a signature program "which was a program that is done across college campuses, 'Guess Who's Gay?'" he explained. "I don't know, there was some folks, myself included, who felt like maybe that wasn't the best social justice program." The program reinforced stereotypes that linked gender non-conforming behaviors with gayness, or reinforced that complex identities like sexual orientation and gender identity could be visually differentiated in really superficial ways.

Yet the program was largely regarded as positive and fun, and drew great crowds, but the subtext was troubling. It was one of the things that the [LGBT Center] was best known for," and some staff were incredibly supportive of continuing with it, while others "were like, 'Is that really what we want to be best known for?'" Ultimately, the decision was made to discontinue the program "after a long heated debate within our staff" and now conversations have shifted to what program might fill the void left in its absence. Marcus has approached leading this change with education, transparency and conversation, listening as much or more than he talks, and helping to guide staff through the process of organizational change.

Similarly, Jade is a student who has worked in her Center for several years, observing management styles and organizational structures through transitions in Center leadership. She spoke about seizing on opportunities for the Center to align and integrate its activities with the work of other Centers to do more intersectional work, including education around white privilege. "I've really been pushing for that, and I think getting more comfortable in the Center. Being like, 'We need to do this. This is important.' And being more adamant about bringing things [up] in the Center," she explained. Opportunities to combine efforts with other centers, and to collaborate towards common goals, was something that Jade wanted strategically included within the formal mission of the Center:

> So I think that now, where we're at and having all the three centers together, I think that's something that we probably need to rework. And I think that on this campus, whether it's reflected in our mission or just things that we need to do, that the intersectionality is something that we probably do need to be more adamant about addressing. Because, beyond what we're doing, the fact that we have many identities represented in the Center, there's still the stigma about LGBT spaces and communities, that they're very white, and that they're very cisgender, and

371

they're very male. So, I think that, regardless of whether or not we're enforcing that, that we have to be cognizant of the students coming with those expectations of Centers. I think that we definitely need to rework our mission, especially with the fact that all three centers are working together too.

Jade's agenda of strategically attending to inclusion of difference beyond LGBTQ+ identity within the mission of the Center and the scope of Center activities evidenced an intentionality to create longevity of commitment that extended beyond a particular Center director's vision for services, activities and offerings, and to guide the efforts of the Center through these leadership transitions.

Jordan described a change process that involved increasing the number of gender inclusive bathrooms across campus. Making physical changes to signage and the identification of bathrooms that could be designated for gender inclusive status was a first step, but Jordan and his planning team recognized that "just making the change won't necessarily fix things," and that thoughtful consideration needed to be given to "really getting people to understand why the change is necessary and prepping them for it." On this campus, that meant outreach and training to custodians and facilities staff members so that they could understand the need for change themselves and support it to others when questioned, "Because they're gonna be dealing with the brand of people asking questions about things going wrong, or why isn't this a certain way?" Jordan noted.

> So, they really worked on the education campaign, as well as starting flipping over different buildings, area by area. And then what they did was, every year they just upped the number of bathrooms. So it was like an incremental approach, which I think was smart, because that then got them to [pause] it kind of eased people into this idea of what this is for, how we're doing it…. We switched over a couple bathrooms, it kind of provided the impetus to do more. So right now, we have pretty much all-gender restrooms in just about every building.

> A thoughtful approach to the problem led to a seamless solution in the way the

372

campus has embraced these gender inclusive bathroom options. Because the change

process included educational aspects, broad based and mindfully targeted staff training

efforts, and incremental change, members of the campus community were able to absorb

the changes without the accompanying consternation and hand-wringing that has

accompanied similar changes on other campuses.

Practicing Advocacy Within Organizational Constraints and Understanding Hierarchies

As described by Jordan in his example of the transition to gender inclusive

bathrooms, change takes place in context, and a strategic approach to its implementation

and management can make all the difference in whether and how the change is

successful.

Often, advocacy and change that is desirable and beneficial for Centers and the

students they serve may be in conflict, to varying degrees, with other institutional

priorities or efforts. Jordan illustrated this conflict by describing calls by LGBTQ+ and

ally faculty and staff for his institution to publicly support efforts in the state to further

marriage equality before public opinion had largely coalesced around its inevitability.

The progressive mission of the institution and its financial position seemed to diminish

the institutional risks of such a stance, but concerns were strong among some

Advancement staff that the advocacy position would unnecessarily hamper fundraising

and development efforts with older and more conservative alumni and friends of the

institution. "The student body and the staff was like, 'Oh yeah of course, [the institution]

should make the statement in favor of saying no to the amendment.'" Expectations were

high that a statement would be forthcoming, and as Center staff, Jordan was a part of

deliberative conversations about how, why and when to respond to these calls for action. "I don't think people understand there was another conversation with the Board of Trustees," he acknowledged, "I think the students think though, because the student culture is so generally accepting, that that's always gonna follow through in every other part of [the institution]." But moving institutional decision-makers to action required persuasive dialogues and efforts towards advocacy that exceeded the view of much of the campus, yet it was a critical role of the Center, in helping the institution balance and live out its progressive self-perceptions and to fully embody its mission.

Earlier, G evidenced problem-solving as she helped students find a way to positively protest restrictions on gay and bisexual men's participation in campus blood drives, but acknowledged that "we don't have the power" to affect actual change to the policy at the federal level where these blood policy decisions are made. "we don't really do anything about it because it's not the school that's the one that's implementing this" although the institution is a partner to critical local efforts to support blood collection. Recognizing the constraint and sphere of opportunity was critical to G in helping to find a solution that was acceptable to students on campus, and that accommodated the limits of the Center's ability to create change.

Jade admitted that "I'm not big on authority to begin with" and through her term of service, experienced considerable autonomy that probably exceeded her abilities and reasonable scope of expectations. This was driven by turnover in Center leadership. "Technically, we had interim directors and stuff, but they weren't really active with the day-to-day stuff," she recalled. A re-organization ensued when a single person was brought in to coordinate efforts among several identity serving Centers on campus. A

structure that had been very fluid, flat and collegial was fleshed out, with some staff identified as leads as layers of oversight were put into place. "Whereas before, it would be like, 'Okay, we're all gonna talk about this and come to a conclusion,'" she was confronted with a hierarchy that felt constraining. She described it as "almost hard to have to answer to somebody, and having that structure [pause] because, I think that it was adjusting to that structure and then still seeing that my input was still being valued" even when ideas or suggestions that she felt strongly about were not able to be implemented or prioritized immediately into Center outcomes and operations.

Yet despite the discomfort that has accompanied these new levels of authority and administration, "I do like the structure now. I think that it helps a lot," she admitted. "I know that there's somebody like an anchor that I can go to which before we didn't have that." The new structure is supportive and valuable, but Jade is also appreciative for the experiences that pushed her to develop her leadership skills and abilities. In the absence of solid leadership, she recalled, "I think we made it work and I think that for me, it built a lot of skills within having that where it was just students really."

Through their experiences in Centers as staff members, volunteers, or clientele, participants were able to describe the ways that their professionalism was enhanced through as they developed skills associated with communication, teamwork, problem solving and program planning, strategic thinking and practicing advocacy within organizational constraints and hierarchies. Center interactions further developed resilience, or strategies that they employ to overcome obstacles to their achievement of desired goals and outcomes, and conversation will now shift towards articulating this important skill set.

Developing Resilience

The second skill or capacity revealed in the data as a theme was that of

developing reslience, and five sub-themes became evident: Code switching; seeking

alternative perspectives; coping with microaggressions; cultivating self-advocacy skills;

embracing self-love. The following will consider the theme broadly and then differentiate

and discuss each sub-theme. Developing identity self-efficacy, and moving toward one's

goals and objectives as an LGBTQ+ person means confronting and overcoming barriers

to one's existence, inclusion, and success. The concept of resilience describes strategies

that individuals employ to overcome these obstacles to the achievement of desired

outcomes. While resilience is often associated with identity work and development

because one's cultural marginalization requires that existence itself is a daily embodiment

of resilience, the skills associated with overcoming adversity and persisting through

resistance are transferable to efforts associated with many problems that are confronted or

goals that are set. Participants in this research discussed considerable ways that they

employed strategies of resilience, such as: code switching, seeking alternate perspectives,

coping with microaggressions, cultivating self-advocacy skills; and embracing self-love.

Code Switching

Code switching occurs when people from marginalized groups, when in the

company of majority actors, adapt by enacting and engaging in behavior practices that are

acceptable to the mainstream culture and that facilitate acceptance, where as in

interactions bounded by the shared marginalized culture, express more authentically or in

ways that align more specifically with one's marginalized identity. An example might be

a gay couple who refrain from physical contact in predominantly heterosexual contexts,

but engage in handholding and other physical gestures that convey coupledom, warmth and care when they are surrounded by other LGBTQ+ people. "I think it's been learned, socialized, to be guarded," Trevor explained "I think many queer people learn or are at least made to think from a very early age that they shouldn't express whatever, their gender identity, their gender expression, their sexual identity, whatever it may be."

Code switching serves as a resilience strategy because it has the potential to reduce social biases and obstacles or barriers to success by creating distance between the individual member and the marginalized group by emphasizing one's inherent acceptability. To majority actors, the code switching individual is perceived and experienced as more "like us" than "like them" therefore reducing perceived threats to the hegemonic status quo. Likewise, marginalized code switchers are able to better or more successfully achieve personal goals and objectives while still expressing cultural authentically in non-dominant contexts.

For Craig, code switching facilitated social acceptance in the largely heteronormative environment of his fraternity, where Craig expressed never feeling overt hostility or rejection around being a "multiple minority" in the chapter–both black and gay, but sometimes experiencing challenges in finding common ground with other members. He explained:

> Only because of the banter that is so common in the LGBTQ community is not so much common in there, or the vocabulary is a lot different. And so, where I'll wanna really say something's fierce, or something's... I know that my audience, the context in which I'm in, they won't understand what that means. So I'll have to explain it, and then the joke's over anyway. So then it's kinda tough, just because I know my audience is different. But not so much where I feel like I have to butch myself up, or check myself. Nothing like that, but I do try to be aware of where I am, and my talking topics are definitely different depending upon where I am…. As a foreign language major, I understand that there's different vernaculars, and

there's different grammar structures between different languages, and so when I interact with other Black people, there's a whole another feeling and emotion behind it because you see, it's like a mirror, almost a mirror, but you see someone else different. You know that they've probably experienced just as much bullshit in their life as you have. Or when I talk to another gay person, I know that they have experienced X, Y and Z just like I've experienced X, Y, Z.

Chelsea described her work environment and a supervisor she perceived as potentially conservative. "While I'm sure she doesn't have a thing against the LGBT+ community, she probably doesn't completely understand it," she explained. And the job is essential to Chelsea's ability to make ends meet financially so she makes compromises in her self expression which is closely aligned with her LGBTQ+ identity. "I kinda have to bend a little bit towards that," she admitted, "and half the time I don't even realize I'm doing it and then I'll be like, 'What are you doing? What are you doing?' So, I think that is somewhere that I find myself being more reserved."

Identifying as a woman and a lesbian, Megan explains that she prefers a more butch persona, but makes adjustments to her expression at the coffee shop where she works on campus. "In the back where the grill and the kitchen are, if I'm in the grill area then I can be myself, but when I go to the front to help customers, it's not fully who I am but for the most part who I am." Both Megan and Chelsea engage in identity self restraint not by virtue of overt instruction, but as a result of social cues around acceptability, and to cultivate appropriate interactions and responses from clientele in the businesses where they work. Appearing and acting more mainstream elicits acceptance.

Landon brought a different perspective, challenging that these compromises in expression or authentic expression were a part of negotiating any interaction or relationship. "I feel like everyone feels that way sometimes. So for example, if you're

gonna talk to your professor, you're not going to wear shirts with sexually explicit things or you're not gonna say explicit things," he explained. "And everyone does that to an extent. Everyone behaves a certain way when they're trying to convey a certain image. So I don't feel like I'm singled out because I'm gay. Because I have to tailor a message to the audience." For Landon, code switching takes place automatically in the context of every individually governed interpersonal dynamic. Landon's experience, however, may belie his own privilege within the LGBTQ+ coalition. As a clean-cut, white, cisgender, masculine-presenting male, Landon naturally presents as very mainstream and acceptable.

This stands in contrast to Andi, a transitioning transwoman, who struggles to fit in. Andi speaks from the diaphragm and her tones are breathy. "Normally, outside, I'll have a higher voice, a feminine passing, like that is probably a female's voice, she explained. "I really can't do it right now because I've been talking like this and then it's weird for me to switch it," she said referencing the conversational tone she has used throughout the interview, that has a high pitch in the baritone range. "But when I'm around people that I don't feel like I have to confirm that I'm female, like if I'm in a comfortable situation, I know these people are looking at me like I'm a girl or trans woman at the very least," and she gestures to the Center referring to safe spaces where her identity is respected, "because I'm a trans woman, whatever, my voice is usually lower. And usually it's lower around the Center just because I know I don't have to sit there and try." For Andi, code switching is physically effortful, as well as mentally exhausting, but essential to her passing and her embodiment of her gender identity.

Seeking Alternative Perspectives

The research revealed a number of participants who looked to others in the community who could provide them with alternate perspectives or alternate ways of approaching problems and overcoming barriers and obstacles. These alternatives opened potential paths that were more fruitful than the ones individuals had initially considered, and so exhibited characteristics of resilience strategies. "It is just nice to be able to come into the [LGBT Center] and hear other people's experiences with issues," conveyed, Megan, "so then if you have that issue, you aren't thrown off about how to react to it or how to deal with it."

Carlos has had similar experiences encountering peers in the Center and other campus spaces where he is able to work through and process his experiences and explore alternatives. "I do like to sit down and unpack things for myself just to see if I'm looking at it right. But I've created a big enough network here of support that there's multiple people," he explained as he began to make a list of friends, mentors and others to whom he turns for advice and perspective, depending on the sort of issues he is encountering. Relatively new in his experience of LGBTQ+ culture, he affirmed, "I haven't been exposed to that too much, so it's a great learning for me too."

Jade described working with a peer on a shared programming effort where she was able to consider an alternate approach to the activity. "She takes her process a lot slower and she has much more of a passive facilitation approach than I do. I'm much more of a lecturer, so I think that finding that balance" between the two preferences to best accomplish the intended outcomes. "What's the most effective way to get this information across?"

380

Brett expressed that his observations of Center staff had served to present alternatives approaches to conflict situations. "I certainly learned a lot in the process of watching [Center staff], and also understanding how to mediate either between students or also helping students understand that yelling at the person who was, who said something wrong, is not the appropriate way to go about it." Sam also found Center staff to be valuable as he was seeking alternate perspectives when he encountered challenges co-leading a campus club. He wanted to protect the members from dissension and disagreement within the leadership community "when one [co-chair was] not doing anything," because he didn't want interpersonal drama to get in the way of the group's important goals. An advisor was able to provide him with a number of suggestions for how he might make progress with the organization, and in addressing the conflict that he was experiencing with his peers, some of which he had already considered, and some of which he had not.

Coping with Microaggressions

Sue (2010) describes microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership" (p. 24) bounded by characteristics such as race, gender, gender identity, sexual-orientation, religious belief, ability, socio-economic status, etc. Readers are invited to consider invisible messages that are both verbal and non-verbal, as well as delivered environmentally. As recipients of microaggressions, individuals have the daily experience of determining to what degree their experience of microaggressions is accurate–whether they actually happened, were perceived or imagine–and how and whether to respond.

Choosing not to recognize or respond to microaggressions is a response in itself that some students make. Describing a situation where he and a friend were called "fags" by the occupants of a passing car, Craig shrugged off the experience as he diminished, "I can understand that people aren't always gonna be as comfortable with themselves like I'm comfortable with myself, so I try not to take it to heart." Similarly Chelsea related that "somebody wrote 'fag' on my white board thing, I wasn't bothered by it. I was like, 'Really? That's ridiculous.' But I understand that other people would be, some other people could be. So, for me, I brush things off."

Lindsey admitted, "I don't know, I sort of have a very fantastic view of [this institution] and try to not think to much about the bad things that happen, although, I know that's kind of a deluded way to live." Carefully protecting an established worldview is a strong motivation to disregard one's own experiences of disenfranchisement. Veronica acknowledged experiences of having "been misgendered several times. And I know that is definitely a big thing for other people." But she declines to let these experiences get to her. "I'm a pretty relaxed person, so I let it go, not to mention I'm confused and I understand why they would misgender me, so I'm pretty relaxed about it."

Veronica is both making excuses for the microaggression behavior of others, and also taking partial responsibility, justifying the experience because she is still developing and exploring her gender identity and expression. Yet she contends that "it does technically count as microaggression, because it could build up. But so far I've just been 'whatever' about it." Veronica's projection of responsibility from perpetrators of microaggression to herself may ultimately be self-defeating and counterproductive, yet it is a not uncommon way for students to manage and cope with microaggressions. Kent

382

has a variant take with similar overtones to Veronica's acceptance of partial responsibility. "Other people have wronged me but I've wronged other people too," stated Kent, "so it's more like putting perspective on everything and realizing there's different perspectives." Kent's stance that everyone makes mistakes is a way of assuming some culpability for his own microaggressions in a way that also diminishes the culpability that others have for theirs. It almost posits a universality where everyone gets back a little of what they give, except that hegemonic systems assure that the marginalized are the expressed targets of microaggression, but also socialized to be complicit as they perpetuate the systems that oppress them.

Owning that "I would say humor is a coping mechanism," Kent buffered the impact of microaggressions in a different way, as well. "I find it hilarious. I've just learned to laugh about it. Because if you can't laugh at yourself and you can't laugh at the stupid crap that happens to you, then you're just gonna be miserable all the time," he shared. As a transman, restrictive housing policy require him to live in a sex-designated residence hall, making him the only man in a hall of otherwise all women. This leads to awkward bathroom encounters, but Kent brushes these off, too. "Depending on the other individual. I personally don't care. You wanna leave the bathroom while I'm in here? More privacy for me. Go right on ahead."

Char shared that she has only recently begun to cultivate a growing recognition "that my experience is valid and that sometimes it's gonna suck. I don't know. In my life it has been easy to write off my own feelings and be like 'Oh, well, maybe it wasn't actually that bad,' or whatever." Denying experiences or diminishing the pain that they inflict, as evidenced by Veronica and Char, can allow students to re-focus their efforts

away from identity and identity work to accomplish other goals or attend to other aspects of life that are more manageable. Yet delusion or avoidance may not ultimately be successful strategies in the long term, and individuals may need to develop additional or alternate coping strategies as they move forward or the collective pain of microaggression encounters builds. For Char, encounters she had imagined as individual and entirely singular began to take shape as a collective. "You start to see patterns, like it's not just me, it's not just this one person said this one thing to me," she explained. "It's a bigger system. And I think that that is something that came through."

No longer interested in internalizing microaggressions or writing them off as unfortunate singular experiences, Char found a similar social circle of "maybe seven queer people, almost all, like, either, woman-identified or trans-identified, and we just were able to connect and to talk about the shitty stuff that had happened that week, and comfort each other and support each other." The group served as a counterspace, and would meet with regularity, but the conversation was informal, encompassing "everything ranging from like a professor making a comment in class that was problematic or fears about going home after this first year," she explained. The community that she created through this process and the friendships that followed "were the most emotionally rewarding in terms of being a queer person at [my institution]" and served as a buffer to the daily indignities served up by microaggressions. Char also restricts her interactions to avoid encounters framed by ignorance. "I'm very intentional about who I spend time with and who I [pause] yeah, who I'm around, that I just really avoid people who give me bad vibes."

Hector takes the opposite approach. "I'm usually the one who likes to make a

comment that could spark some thought among people," he explained with a mischievous grin, "because then discussions can rise and conversations about these issues that sometimes go unnoticed or ignored." Hector noted that his experience of addressing identity transgressions on campus was easier than doing the same thing during his study abroad experience to France, where he felt on less firm footing culturally and socially. "I like being in the element of discomfort, in certain spaces, not everywhere, right?" To address or avoid a microaggression response is an individual decision based on context, comfort and one's own need to respond or act in that moment to that microaggression.

Kent reported generally good experiences confronting microaggressions. Describing a classroom situation where he felt microaggressed by a faculty member, he recalled that "as soon as I spoke up and said something to the individual, they were like, 'Oh, I didn't even think about it. I just. It's never been an issue in any of my classes.'" The faculty member followed up by making adjustments to adjust "that particular lecture to be a little different. So I mean if you just step up and say something. Usually people just don't think about it."

Chelsea acknowledged that she has grown in her ability and willingness to confront microaggressions. Asked to wear a polo as part of her work uniform, she asked for the men's cut for comfort, but her supervisor declined, providing her with the more form fitting women's cut instead. "I didn't want to wear the girl Polo. It was too tight and it was short," but she acquiesced and didn't argue. Since that time, her attitude has changed dramatically. "Now it would be like, 'Give me the boy Polo. Don't make me call HR. [chuckle] I do not wanna have this conversation with you.' But then I was like, 'Okay', and I just took it."

Mary noted that in counterspace, such as the company of peers who share an identity affinity, the discussion often turns to shared experiences of oppression and ways that students make meaning of and respond to them:

> We talk a lot about dealing with our families, the difference between being at home and being here and stuff like that. And other things, too, but that, I think, is the thing where most people have expressed stress and me as well. So having that space where talking about [and] very intentionally discussing our problems and how others have coped with it and things like that, has been really, really useful.

This practice of developing or strategizing responses to microaggressions was a common theme among respondents. Referring to her social group, Veronica shared that "they all have their own coping strategies, like [C] breathes. So sometimes it's just nice to just sit there and just take a breath" And Brett explained that "we're working with students all the time in various places of understanding, so helping them understand what better ways there are to say certain things or how to react to negative experiences" was a goal of Center staff on his campus. "I think helping them navigate that is something really important that we have to work on."

Brett went on to point out that just as students encountered microaggressions from peers outside the LGBTQ+ community, even members of the community and allies crossed lines and made mistakes in the way that differences were addressed within the space of the Center. These in-community microaggressions afforded students with opportunities to check each other in relative safety. Speaking of these interactions in the Center, Brett said:

> It's also a good place for students to practice dealing with microaggressions, because we make it very clear that you're allowed to address things respectfully with people. Whereas, if students have never done that before and they're interacting with the service provider on campus and that service provider says something, they may not know how to respond other than just take it and move

on, and let it pile on. So I feel like the Center educates people how to deal effectively with microaggressions.

Tara related that another way that Center staff help students to cope with microaggressions is by making reporting mechanism visible. "A professor had said something," she shared. "It didn't feel right, the way he said it, and I was talking to [Center staff] about it and he was like, 'You can report that. And that's how we get things stopped at this campus.'"

Students cope with microaggressions in a variety of ways, including by avoiding, diminishing or laughing them off. Microaggressions can also be confronted directly, processed through venting and sharing with peers in community, or through official campus reporting structures that allow students to report incidents of bias. Centers serve the invaluable role of providing space for students to share, develop and cultivate skills that help them cope with microaggressions, and to gain resilience strategies that will serve them as they make and accomplish goals and objectives on campus and beyond campus.

Cultivating Self-Advocacy Skills

A significant aspect of resilience involves the ability to articulate and advocate for oneself. The ability to articulate one's needs, views and interests, and persuade others to accommodate them is an essential skill for moving forward goals and objectives across a number of domains. Yet social marginalization, and the associated cultural messages of exclusion often accompany an inability or unwillingness of marginalized individuals to acknowledge their own worth or make requests or set expectations for how others treat them. Participants discussed ways that Center participation helped them develop a voice

and skill set commensurate with self-advocacy activity.

For Char, self advocacy looks like "being able to talk about experiences and name them as homophobic or racist or sexist. So, having the working knowledge of how homophobia can manifest itself and to learn how to name that and call it out."

Max employed self-advocacy to obtain a locker space within the gender inclusive locker room at the university recreation center. After the institution committed to and developed this more inclusive locker room space as an extension of trans awareness and inclusion work on campus, Max approached rec center staff to request a locker assignment. "And he looks at me and he goes, 'Do you need it?' And I was like and I said, 'Yes.' I was actually much more shy," he recalled, and the conversation continued as it escalated Max's discomfort. "And he goes, 'Well, can't you just use the women's locker room?' And I went, 'No. I'm not a girl.'" As he tells the story, Max is fidgety and frustrated. "And he went [pause] and there was just kind of like a pause and then he went, 'Okay. Let me see what I can do.'" The staff member then instructed a student assistant who was present for the interaction to "Get her name and her information and I'll get back to her when I can," using female pronouns in the face of both Max's masculine presentation and earlier statement that he was not a girl or woman. It was a clear and intentional microaggression and Max experienced hurt and anger.

After a week, Max emailed the staff member to inquire about resolution, and he acted as if he had no knowledge of the request or situation, and denied that gender-inclusive locker room space was available at all. When Max went to the recreation center to confirm for himself that the locker room was physically present, a hand-written sign reading "family locker room" had been taped over the official "all-gender locker room"

signage. Furious now at his treatment and exclusion, Max made his way to the Dean of Students Office. There he encountered support and partnership, as the Dean's staff made contact with rec center staff to accommodate Max's reasonable request. The request for locker space was granted, but Max did not receive acknowledgement or apology for the identity transgressions, the run-around or the extra time and effort required of him. Despite his willingness to continue to persist in his desire and demand for locker space in the gender-inclusive locker room, and his success in receiving the permanent locker assignment, the circumstance had a strong negative impact on Max's campus experience.

Brett discussed employing self-advocacy around health care and his trans identity. "Having access to hormone replacement therapy, having access to surgical benefits is important as a trans person. So, they've empowered me to advocate for that on my own behalf," he said referring to encouragement received from Center staff to raise these issues with human resources and student health services. Brett went the extra mile in preparing for and making the case for benefits that made sound business sense, but also served his identity interests. "When we met with HR, I had this huge policy brief that I wrote up for them on every national policy that affects trans health insurance and they were really shocked, because they had never heard any of this stuff," he recalled. In this case, Brett's advocacy resulted in some additional medical benefits and coverage, although not to the full extent of his recommendation. Yet he felt good and affirmed that he had been able to make a difference for himself that extended to and would continue to serve others who followed him.

Sheryl is an administrator who sees the value of including students in conversations about policy change to provide them with opportunities to express their

needs and advocate for themselves. "Surely, the whole conversation that we're currently having about transgender students, issues around facilities and accommodations, the development of the learning community that we're going to have. All those are examples of teaching students how to advocate for themselves," she noted.

During the job search, Spryte made some decisions about how they would stand up for their identity and identity-related needs as they interacted with potential employers:

> My name is Spryte, and most people don't accept that as your real name, and so they go, "So what's your real name?" I'm like "Spryte, that's what it is, just deal with it, I'm not going to get my birth certificate out for you. I'm not going to show you my driver's license." And I figure, if a company does interview me I'll have to tell them I use a preferred name, "yeah, here's my legal name, please refer to me as that." And the companies who sat and wanted to actually interview me respected that and that's good, that's a company I wanna work for.

In addition to acting in the moment to affirm Spryte's preferred name and identity, their self-advocacy extends to assuring an alignment of values between oneself and a potential future employer and worksite. Choosing to explore only opportunities that comport with one's expectations around one's treatment and that are congruent with one's identity expression are major acts of self-advocacy, especially in the face of a challenging job market.

Andi described being able to speak up and speak out in situations that are unrelated to identity, but where she needs to assert her interests or position. She gives one example of reporting that her fast food was prepared improperly. "A year ago, I would've barely talked to a person at a fast food counter," she noted, but with a growing confidence she finds she is able and willing to assert her needs with greater frequency. In this case "I went up there and talked and like affirmed my position as who I am and what I need

390

done." She attributes much of this presence to her experience as a trans person, and the

way her identity has developed through her campus experiences and Center involvement:

> Being trans has probably affected that due to the fact that I do kind of have to
> reaffirm my position as who I am as a person and as a student and on campus
> about what I deserve, or what should be accommodated for me medically, at the
> very least, and if not for my own psyche, and for my own mental wellness,
> because people don't always understand. A lot of people don't understand trans
> people and what they should probably get just for their own well-being, and so I
> have to push that on people sometimes, and make them understand if they don't
> choose to understand.

Along with asserting her interests in daily transactions, and around medical

issues, Andi has acted as a self-advocate in obtaining housing accommodations that

honor her gender identity and provide her with the environment and privacy she needs to

be successful. "They set me in a guys dorm for the summer, and I had to go there and tell

them that this can't be, like this literally just cannot be a thing." The summer

accommodation that Andi requested was met with resistance because of the nature of the

facilities that were available in the summer, but she persisted until an acceptable

accommodation was offered. "I guess that might have been a situation which I'm pushing

what should be done for trans people."

When a woman student approached the Center to vent about a classroom

environment, where a dominant male peer was expressing opinions that suggested

women and feminine-presenting people were lesser than their male counterparts, Ale

provided encouragement and resources for the student to use in pushing back against this

sexism and genderism. "She came back some weeks later and told us again that she

talked about it in class and that she specifically gave the postcard to the person who had

made that comment for them to come to the events," she recalled. "I was happy because I

391

felt like we encouraged her to take action in school." In this case and countless other formal and informal interactions, Center staff provide coaching and skill development to assist individuals in finding a level of comfort with activities of self-advocacy.

As a lesbian, Megan felt moved to respond when faced with a classroom discussion in Sociology of Gender about lesbians' gender expression, comparing more femme "lipstick lesbians" with others who express as butch. In these situations where lesbianism becomes a topic of conversation, Megan shared that "I always feel like I'm being stared at. I don't know if I am, but I just get that feeling that people will be looking at me, or looking at me to raise my hand and make a comment." At this time in her life, Megan was expressing as femme, and so when a peer asserted that all lesbians were butch, and that "lipstick lesbians" didn't exist. "She said she's never seen one, and that just lit a fire inside me," acknowledged Megan. "I raised my hand and I was like, 'Yeah, the reason that you don't think there are any lipstick lesbians is because when you see a lipstick lesbian, you don't identify them as a lesbian." Megan made reference to her own presence in the classroom, outing herself as a way of making the point. "You think they're a normal person, and that's the reason that you don't think you've seen any. And that's the reason you think there are only dyke lesbians.'" The paradox of Megan's self-advocacy is that her identity leaves her feeling both invisible and highly visible, even as she explains that while she felt put on the spot, her coming out was a surprise to peers in the class.

Megan's willingness to confront classroom assertions that characterized lesbians as monolithic was an act of self-advocacy, but her telling of the story shows that she has developed a critical self-love, as well. She continues to define and refine her gender expression, appearing intentionally more butch recently, as reflective of her comfort level

392

around her identity, but also admittedly to create affinity with and attract the sort of sporty, butch woman that she favors herself.

Embracing Self-Love

For Ale, self-awareness reflected self-love on a number of levels. "I identify as a Latina woman, a *mujer*. I am very proud and always make sure to emphasize my ethnicity and my culture," she explained, conveying as a Latina separating ethnicity and gender as individual or component identities seemed inauthentic. "I definitely identify with my ethnicity a lot too, it's very important to me, as well as my gender. Being a woman, I'm also an advocate for [pause] I'm a feminist." One of Ale's passions, and a way of expressing her self-love, is through this sort of intersectional exploration. "I think the Latino LGBTQ community is so full of culture, and full of history, that we are so not aware of." As she speaks, the intensity of her interest shines. "I've read a lot of articles where people from the community feel like they can't have both of those identities together. They feel like they can't be a person from the LGBT community and a Latino person together, she explained. "I think, we just really need to bring that together, because, ultimately, those are two parts of you that I think everyone should be allowed to identify with."

For Ale and other participants in the study, embracing self-love extended beyond advocating for one's needs, and growing an awareness of one's strengths, weaknesses and self, to engaging in acceptance and appreciation for one's fully-realized self in spite of one's flaws as an act of resilience, particularly juxtaposed with social messages around identity that are diminishing, destructive, hurtful and hateful.

Kent describes himself as an "in-your-face kind of person." As a transman, he has

spent considerable effort becoming, and becoming comfortable with, the man that he is. Part of his resilience is resisting pressures to be a socially acceptable type of trans person or embody a comfortable or comforting persona to create ease in others. "You accept me or you don't. If you don't accept me, well that's your problem," he explained. "I'm not gonna change for you, that's not my priority. If you don't want to be around me then don't be around me, but I'm not gonna go out of my way to avoid you because you are uncomfortable." He admitted that "I feel like sometimes that bothers people. I guess I can be a little abrasive," but not apologetic. Kent's self-love is reflected in his acceptance of these parts of himself that reflect his comfortability in his skin, and his appreciation for the to-date fully formed man that he has intentionally become.

Sometimes self-love comes in the form of acknowledgement that one has achieved a goal, as in through Lavender Graduation participation. Craig explains that this event serves as a:

> little reminder like that "You know, hey, you did it and you're LGBTQ at the same time. Let's take this moment to reflect that." Sometimes this does not happen for LGBTQ kids. Or sometimes this does not happen for Black people, or sometimes this does not happen for men or women, or left handed-people or right-handed people.

Veronica similarly found that engagement in a community of LGBTQ+ people, to partake in conversations, explorations and celebrations together helped her cultivate a rich appreciation for herself. "I think that's what helps me not only cope with being LGBTQ on campus," she expressed, "but also learning to love myself off campus as well." For Veronica, the supportive campus community, and her engagement in it, has allowed her to cultivate the sort of rich appreciation for others that is reflected in a love for herself that will extend into her life and endeavors well beyond the campus

experience and borders. "I learned to be an ally to others but also figuring out how to self love, how to be an ally to identities that I have."

<div align="center">Cultivating a Social Justice Lens</div>

The final skill or capacity revealed in the data as a theme was that of cultivating a social justice lens, and five sub-themes became evident: Identifying inequities; showing awareness of intersectionality; showing empathy; employing bystander behaviors; and engaging across difference. The following will consider the theme broadly and then differentiate and discuss each sub-theme. A final skill set that participants related developing was the ability to see and respond to the world through a social justice lens, which participants used to buffer, interpret and understand encounters and interactions with other individuals and experiences of the world. Individuals explained how they employed a social justice lens as they identified inequities, and showed an awareness of intersectionality as they experienced and made sense of systems of oppression. A social justice lens also invited action appropriate to making desired cultural change. Participants were activated to show empathy, to engage across difference, and to employ bystander behaviors in interactions characterized by marginalization. Interpreting the world through a social justice framework affords marginalized individuals to ability to experience and understand their own social exclusion and that of other marginalized people.

Identifying Inequities

The ability to critically examine social structures and situations and identify inequities is a critical component of social justice awareness. Both as they relate to justice issues around the marginalization of individuals based on sexual orientation and gender identity, but across domains of exclusion, Center participation cultivates the ability of

students to address and redress social marginalization.

Jade identified inequity in the experience of trans students including "the day-to-day things that people deal with. For example, having to tell your professor your pronouns, or tell them that the name that's on their roster isn't the name that you go by. It's not your name." Similarly, Brett pointed to intake forms in health services locations that failed to include gender identity in meaningful ways. "They were saying, 'We're inclusive,' but their forms weren't reflecting that."

Noting the invisibility of disparate treatment by majority actors, Brett was quick to point out that while the intake forms "didn't have anything about gender identity or sexual orientation or partner preference" that the omission was likely unintentional, and had a considerable impact on the willingness of marginalized students to take advantage of these services and opportunities that were funded by their fees and provided as necessary and appropriate supports for students' success. "It's like okay you're seeing yourselves as being inclusive, but students are not interpreting it that way," he explained.

Marcus was confronted with a personal realization about inequities even within the LGBTQ+ coalition, and that, as a white gay man, he enacted privilege in the Center related to "how dominating gay men can be." What he intended as efforts to move forward the goals and mission of the Center wasn't experienced as intended by members of the trans community whose priorities and goals differed from his own. It was a process of learning "how important it is for gay men to be trans allies" that would extend into allyship to other communities. "Being a white ally to Communities of Color and stuff, that came later. I didn't really start exploring that aspect until later. But that's one thing I learned to think about the diversity of the queer community."

396

Similar to Marcus, Mary noted when she arrived on campus, the LGBT organization "tended to focus a lot on white cisgender gay males for the most part. And occasionally white cisgender, gay females. But not a lot of bi, definitely not a lot of gender variant. Not a lot of other races."

G observed gender inequity in the physical structure of several campus buildings where science departments, classrooms and labs were housed:

> The science building, the main science building, there is. It's a pretty old building, I'm not sure when it was built, probably like in the '50s or '40s. But in the basement of that building, there's one restroom and it's just a male restroom. And that's it. And I'm assuming it was built in the time when it was extremely male-dominated and there [were] no women that were in the sciences. So that's probably why they only had the men's restroom downstairs. But I also noticed in Humboldt Hall, which is where the biology labs are at, where the men's restroom is downstairs and the women's restroom is upstairs.

G recognizes that women can and do find additional and alternate bathrooms in these buildings. But the message that the physical structure reinforces is that science spaces are not intended for women. Looking around her at other women who are professors and peers, and engaged in science majors and directed to science careers, G is reminded of a friend's observation that "we can be diverse, but that doesn't necessarily mean we are inclusive."

Chelsea similarly related her perception that on campus "everything is very gendered here. Boys do one thing, girls do the other. Lots of unnecessarily gendered ways of being." Carlos extended his observation about inequity in the sciences beyond gender as it intersected with race, sexual orientation, and gender identity. "It's hard to find women in the sciences. It's hard to find Women of Color in the sciences and I can only imagine how hard it is to find a Woman of Color within the LGBTQ community, in

397

science." He unpacked the thought further, "you think of a person of color trying to break into a science, like a Man of Color, a Woman of Color, trying to break into the sciences, how hard that is." For Carlos, a lack of appropriate models and mentors provided an even greater barrier to success. "And then, coming from an even more underrepresented community, that's gotta be tough. Who do you confide in? Who do you talk to? Who do you get support from? Who are gonna understand issues?"

Carlos's identification of inequity in this instance is infused with an awareness that marginalization is compounded for those who embody multiple identities are subjects of social exclusion, and that an individual's experience cannot be successfully compartmentalized, but must be understood in the context of intersecting and converging identities. An awareness of intersectionality is a second critical skill developed through Center participation that applies to cultivating a social justice lens.

Showing Awareness of Intersectionality

Many participants spoke of gaining capacity of the complexity of identity and the ways that identity intersections have meaning for the ways that individuals experience social inclusion and exclusion. Through her interactions with peers in the Center and through organizations that serve LGBTQ+ people and causes, Char was able to begin to understand and articulate the ways that intersectional identities created powerful differences in individuals' experience of the world:

> We can't just talk about queer issues, because queer issues affect people so differently depending on where they are, whether they're white or a Person of Color or middle class or working class or way upper middle class, or if they're a child of immigrants or a citizen. And I think that that was something that I was really missing when I came in. It was like "Yay, I get to be friends with all these queer people," and I was just imagining queer middle class, white, educated people, and I really had a lot of learning to do coming in. And I'm so grateful that

398

there were spaces for me to do that learning and that thinking, but if they didn't exist I think I'd be in that same place of just thinking that queer issues are white, middle class issues.

Mary articulated having the opposite experience as she discussed a student organization that served to provide social support for women in the LGBTQ+ community. Yet she observed that "it's not very ethnically diverse at all. It's not very religiously diverse. It's not very economically diverse. It's a lot of girls who look like me basically in a room together." For Mary, homogeneity made group interactions generally comfortable, "which is nice sometimes because we can all say something and be like, 'Yeah, I feel that too.'" But the lack of difference curtailed the opportunity for group members to expand their horizons and learn from the perspectives of others, leading her to conclude that "I think the educational part of it is kind of lacking there."

Max's experience was similar in some ways as he observed "people wanting to be inclusive of People of Color of other minoritized groups, but then also not necessarily acting upon that, because… of people being afraid of tokenizing. But then, out of their fear of tokenizing, just don't include people." Spryte has, at times, felt erased, but not excluded by virtue of their identity as asexual, and simply not having their identity addressed in conversations targeting the broader LGBT population. "I've had students talk about feeling marginalized, just by virtue of being in the plus, and not really feeling like that's included and not really knowing sort of, what to do about that," they shared. "I can see it. It's just like it's one of those things that I feel bad for anybody who isn't L, G, B or T. Because if you're not in one of the four, you're erased but not on purpose." Yet in other ways, Max described peers being very intentional and somewhat evolved in the ways that they addressed other aspects of intersectionality. "They're really good about

399

intersections with mental illness. They're really good about intersections with health. Really good with intersections of… sexual violence and things like that."

Brett drew on intersectionality around LGBTQ+ identity and intersections with national identity and the laws of other lands. "Are we gonna talk about putting LGBTQ people in the field? What happens when we send students to Tanzania or Uganda, and they're LGBT identified? They wanna do their research there but can we ensure their safety?" By asking these questions and engaging in dialogues about how to best serve students as fully-realized people, Brett was able to "see how LGBTQ identities intersect with a lot of different other identities, like, from professional experiences."

"A lot of the stuff I learned about intersectionalities of identity, like it's okay to be gay and be a Christian, that's something I learned through the Center," noted Kent.

For some individuals, simply living out marginalized identities was a constant object lesson as students who were subject to marginalization across identities interacted with social structures and institutions never intended to serve them. To illustrate, Jordan related that "I feel like the more intersecting the more of these identities that you have the more–you're more critical and aware of what you do and do not have here at [this institution] when it comes to support." Jade affirmed this point when she described "being more aware of the ways that I'm viewed within society and being able to connect the dots and the things that I've experienced in my life." To that end, she acknowledged that the way that she describes herself has evolved. "It feels more authentic to me to identify as a bi-racial black person, rather than just be, 'Well I'm half-black and white.'" In addition, she's grown to describe herself as a queer cisgender feminist with a super-femme gender identity expression. But she's not afraid to challenge herself, questioning

400

and playing with her own interpretations and understandings of her identities. "So, yeah, I think that being more critical of things like that and labels and stuff has definitely been a part of me working in this Center."

Ale's programming experiences in her Center role have focused on intersectional identities, and more recently she has found herself "emphasizing more People of Color in the community because I think, a lot of the times, a lot of things we do and a lot of the people who are sort of emphasized in our events are usually white people." This is an important practice for her because of perceptions reinforced through her own experience of being a Latina, and seeing similar LGBTQ+-identified people who "feel like they can't have both of those identities together. They feel like they can't be a person from the LGBT community and a Latino person together." Her events center on intersectionality of Latinos and LGBTQ+ identity because "the Latino LGBTQ community is so full of culture, and full of history, that we are so not aware of, and I think it's gonna be great to bring it out there."

Carlos spoke of the important work that takes place when Centers "tackle intersections. They tackle your representation. I mean, just even like having a space for people to come in as people." He reminded that as Centers create safe space where people can express fully and authentically, they also develop communities" that can begin to break down and solve bigger system issues and problems. "It's like, you have a community that comes in here and talks about maybe this is the issue that's happening right now." Bigger problems may require greater collaborative responses drawn from broad-based dialogues. "Alright, with all our skills, let's come in here and let's unpack this. Not only unpack it, let's present it to the campus if this is a problem." Intersectional

awareness leads to coalition work and solutions that attend to the needs of individuals broadly represented across identity domains as individuals show empathy, engage across difference and employ bystander behaviors to disrupt assumptions and engage better outcomes.

Showing Empathy

Research on Millenials has suggested that todays young people are less likely than those of previous generations to exhibit and react with empathy as they consider the circumstances and situations of others (Twenge, 2006). As the ability to shift perspective and consider the experience of another from their point of view, empathy is an important capacity because it emphasizes the opportunity and responsibility that any of us have to diminish pain and hardship around us by leveraging one's authority, influence and resources. Failing to show empathy reflects a hardness of the heart, and a disinterest or unwillingness to extend oneself to resolve or relieve others of undue or unfortunate burdens.

Participants discussed examples of how their Center involvement cultivated or activated empathic responses. Jade described cultivation of empathy through her role working at a Center and interacting with a broad range of Center users:

> For example, I've noticed a lot of trans students or gender nonconforming students who are lacking that support in those systems within the University, whether it be peers or administrators or whoever. And how we have noticed students step away and either not even be a part of the institution anymore. They just drop out. Or just the day-to-day things that people deal with. For example, having to tell your professor your pronouns, or tell them that the name that's on their roster isn't the name that you go by. It's not your name. So, I think that, in a lot of ways, it's opened my eyes up to that, to those things and then also, helping me be a better advocate for people. Especially people who don't share my identity within the community. And I think that I have gotten more comfortable–I'm still in some ways uncomfortable when it comes to [pause]–We get sensitive visits and stuff

like that. So, I have gotten a lot more comfortable with that, in being able to like sit down and listen and talk to somebody and be an ear and get them the help that they're wanting and needing in that moment. So, I think that that's, those are a couple of things that I've really learned through being here.

Jade exhibits awareness that the experience of marginalization diminishes students' achievement potentials, because they have to constantly compromise or conform their gender identity or expression, that their energies are unduly employed in self-advocacy or in educating and informing others, or that they drop out of school altogether because of social pressures. Further, she deploys assistance appropriate to her means, by listening, reflecting and referring people in need to resources or referrals that can support them.

Carlos's exposure to LGBTQ+ identities that were unlike his own "definitely challenged me in the way that I talk, and in the way of listening to what I'm gonna say, how I'm gonna say it." Adjusting his own use of language to create safer space for others reflected an empathic awareness of the power of language in constructing reality. Yet his empathic awareness extended to more concrete experiences of rejection and intolerance experienced by LGBTQ+ people, as well. "I think it's made me a little more aware of issues that surround LGBTQ, around People of Color within the LGBTQ community," he explained before positing an example, "I wouldn't see myself getting kicked out of my house for coming out to my parents. I think they would be accepting, but I couldn't say that they would. So, it's not something that I personally have experienced." Carlos describes growing up in a context of street violence and the constant threat of harm, which shaped the men in his family to be reserved and relatively circumspect, and as he considers consequences of coming out in his own life, he revealed his risks and

vulnerabilities. "I probably would've lost some of them because of their masculine ideals and view points on how a man should be. So that's allowed me to just observe different situations in a kind of a new prism [or] paradigm."

As a person who has been out for as long as she can recall, G spoke of the value of hearing the stories and experiences of peers who were involved in this process in their own lives. "I've been out for so long, that it's hard for me to remind myself that there's people that are not out, that are in different stages of coming out," she explained. "So that it's nice to be here and to hear other people's stories and how much they're out or how much they're not out, or how much it took for them to come out." Her experience working in the Center and interacting with people across the LGBTQ+ spectrum continues to reinforce the importance of empathy and awareness in the health sciences, where G imagines her future.

Interacting with peers who are planning to be doctors and dentists, G's empathy allows her to consider potential obstacles to appropriate medical care that are influenced or determined by identity. "They're going to encounter a lot of people. You never know when you're going to encounter someone who's transgender who's taking the hormones and then you have a doctor prescribing pills. They're going to interact." She underscored that being able to see medical experiences through the eyes of patients, particularly marginalized patients, was critical. "You have to understand what it's like to be taking testosterone…; knowing that you're going to have patients constantly coming in and out that are going to be of different genders, of different sexes." Looking forward to her post-baccalaureate path, G's empathic understanding of the ways that fully informed physicians can best serve the needs of LGBTQ+ clientele has already inspired her to

404

begin planning for awareness-raising activities among her peers. "One thing that I'm looking as a long term thing, maybe not now, maybe in grad school about trying to help pre-medical students get a better understanding of what it's like to be interacting with an LGBT identified person."

Trevor considered his experience as a TA, and the type of classroom environment that best serves students' learning outcomes as he prepares for a career as a professor. While he has not encountered LGBTQ+ identified faculty in his own classroom experiences, "I'd like to think I would create an inclusive environment. Hopefully, I'm gonna strive for that, at least." Along with achieving a comfortability that allows students to fully and authentically engage, Trevor explained that there is critical value in students being able to see others with similar identities engaged in professions and activities that interest them. To that end, he would make it a priority "to create an environment where people feel comfortable to a degree, being out if not in the whole classroom, but to me, if they want to come to me and talk to me about their coming out experience."

Employing Bystander Behaviors

In addition to engaging with others who are similar to and different from them in considerable and meaningful ways, students who activate bystander behaviors in response to intolerance or injustice can have considerable influence on a situation's outcomes. Educators have observed that when students spend time in advance collectively and individually considering how they might respond or react when confronted with critical situations, such as those that involve intolerance or injustice, bullying, hazing or coercion, high risk behavior and health risks related to drinking and drug use, or other situations where outcomes might be improved by the individuals'

405

influence or involvement, they are more likely to intervene, and the interventions that they choose are more likely to create better outcomes. Engaging students and others in this activity of situational planning has become characterized as bystander intervention training, and the interventions considered during these thought exercises and then activated in similar situations that follow are referred to as bystander behaviors.

Participants, such as Tara talked about how they engaged and activated bystander behaviors in their everyday interactions around LGBTQ+ marginalization, and other situations that were concerning but did not relate to identity. In Tara's case, she expressed appreciation for the knowledge and education she had received about the trans community "because I think they get it the worst." Her conversation turned towards a trans best friend with whom she spends a lot of time. "So if I hear someone say something, not directed at me, but at my best friend, and the way he presents," as happens frequently when they are out in public, she explained, "I can help him combat that, because I'm now more aware of the trans community, the issues and the right way to handle things."

Felicia's own coming out process was an opportunity to develop interventions she might employ when, for instance, "I'm having trouble with my parents, like their acceptance of sexuality." Through formal and informal Center interactions, particularly through coaching and mentorship of Center staff who shared "maybe you can try this, or maybe you can try that," Felicia developed "skills to pick up when I come out to somebody who isn't as accepting."

Spryte was the beneficiary of bystander behaviors leveraged by an accepting roommate. Spryte's coming out as asexual "didn't bother her at all. But she also was kind

406

of a stickler about people getting it right and not doing things that would potentially be what she might think was offensive to me, which I thought was really interesting." The roommate extended herself to help facilitate supportive behavior and language of others on the floor and in shared social contexts such that the pressure of educating everyone around them was diminished for Spryte. "When I switched my name, she was the first person to switch it, she switched it in her phone, she started telling everybody." This was relieving to Spryte who expressed general social anxiety unrelated to identity, and served to facilitate the depth and breadth of Spryte's coming out.

Jade explained that she employed bystander behavior based on assumptions that others make about gender identity and sexual orientation. When she started spending more time in the Center, and ultimately started working there, she became more aware of "a lot of things that other students experience, in [my] being cisgender as well, there are a lot of things that weren't necessarily on my radar." She resists these assumptions by "checking people" or disrupting assumptions that are made about her based on observed gender identity and assumed sexual orientation. "So, if I say 'my ex' in a conversation, they'd be like, 'Oh, he,' and automatically use male pronouns, and stuff like that. So I know I always have to check that." As a bisexual queer woman, the identities reflected by these pronoun assumptions are often inaccurate and uncomfortable, and the assumptions themselves even when language comports is uncomfortable, because it conveys heteronormativity and cisnormativity. Jade's resistance is complicated because the space of pushback is often characterized by the unfamiliar. "The majority of the people that I'm surrounded by, when it comes to the people that I seek out, are within these spaces," she says referring to the Center and the peers around her, "so in a lot of ways, I'm shielded

407

from that." Thus more consideration is warranted for how to confront assumptions in spaces that may be unfamiliar or hostile to the sorts of values that such "privilege checking" resists.

Faith shared just such a circumstance that took place in one of her lab classrooms as she was engaged with a small group of peers in a class exercise:

> Well for instance, in my bio/psych lab, there was a gal that dressed a little differently. She had a masculine look to her, but she was very colorful and flamboyant at the same time. So she really stood out. And she had her hair real short and fixed wild, and she didn't shave her legs, and some things that were not so mainstream. And she wore masculine clothes, but they were real brightly colored. And one of my lab partners was saying to the group of us, "Ugh, why does... How can she dress like that?" And he was criticizing her and telling her that she needed to act more like a girl or something. And I was like, "Wow, dude, what does that have to do with you and why does that you offend you?" And he said, "Well... Well... Well," and then he didn't talk to me much after that.

Faith's bystander behavior response halted the behavior in this instance, but did not cultivate further conversation that might invite attitudinal change or values evolution for the student who made the original comments. Yet she was confident that important seeds had been planted to encourage consideration around respect and inclusion related to interactions that would follow. Bystander behaviors don't come as naturally or easily to every student, however, even those that are knowledgeable and well-trained. Shannon was still exploring the sorts of interventions she could be comfortable with in similar situations, acknowledging peers or even TAs "who sometimes use inappropriate language to describe things like gay, faggot. And it makes me really uncomfortable."

Shannon experiences dissonance in these situations, both wanting to act and fearing to act. "Even though I work at the Centers and we talk about, 'Oh address things when they need to be addressed,' it's like when you're not in work it's like, 'Okay, how

408

can I respond?'" Yet even when she feels she has strategized appropriately, she found

that "it's kind of harder for me to respond outside of work because at work is where I get

to talk about it. And those situations make me very uncomfortable." She finds that she

freezes in the instant, her discomfort with conflict in the moment tamping down any

effort she might make to act out. As she calms down and her anxiety passes, she

acknowledged that "it usually takes me like an hour. So it's like after the whole incident's

done, 'What could I have said?'" She knows that sometimes her inability to respond

implies her support of what is being said, so she continues to try, "because I think those

things definitely need to be addressed, because I hear them quite often around campus."

Engaging Across Difference

The work of advancing social justice goals comes from broad-based coalition

driven work. Such efforts require that assembled groups of people work across their

differences to find new ways of forging just and equitable social structures that honor

fully-realized and authentically-expressed individuals. Sheryl described hearing a

member of an employer panel on her campus talk about how "you would be a better

employee, have greater opportunities for leadership, if you've developed cultural

competencies [on campus]." Sheryl would argue that engagement around difference is

not value-added to the curriculum, it is an essential aspect for students who want to

achieve their full potential. Further, she stated:

> I heard one of these folks say, "Now, I'm not saying that you won't get employed
> at our company, but if you don't understand how to work with, deal with people
> that are different, you're not gonna make it to leadership. Because that's what we
> have to have in order to be successful."

> Developing skills that allow for respectful engagement with others who are

similar and different in considerable ways is a critical aspect of cultivating a social justice lens. Jordan notes that "getting students to really engage across difference can sometimes be difficult" because it requires that individuals make themselves vulnerable, that they remain open to self-discovery and criticism, and that they honestly examine conceptions, admitting when and where they have unlearning to do and change to make.

Lindsey was grateful for her involvement in the Center and its activities because she gained "concrete skills on how to facilitate and how to be a leader, and how to deal with inter-community conflict." Sam expressed a similar sentiment as he explained gaining capacity around "talking about issues, and group discussions about issues, and how to navigate those [which] has been really helpful." Mary shared an example of honoring difference to facilitate personal development and understanding. Seeing a growing cohort of students who identified as asexual in their LGBT organization was a challenge because that identity was absent on the executive board. "None of us identify that way. So we have to really make sure that we're listening and understanding what's happening, she explained. "Because I think there's a tendency for us to talk about our [pause] what we relate to. So making an effort to understand identities that we didn't necessarily [embody]" became an important part of their leadership strategy. "There's a different level of education required when you're having to deal with students who are Aces or aromantic versus students who are traditional, gay, white male cis[gender] versus students who are trans. It's really interesting."

Chelsea agreed that even within the LGBTQ+ acronym, the interactions of people of a broader range of identities required new ways of engaging and communicating with one another, especially as some identities became more prevalent and mainstream, and

others emerged. "I feel like we have a large a trans community, and I feel they're more accepted than somebody who is bisexual or pansexual, which is fine; everybody should be accepted," she affirmed. "But I think it's really interesting because the Plus doesn't get talked about a lot."

Char spent time discussing and unpacking the ways that identity transgressions were addressed among peers. Considering a growing trend on her campus and in communities where differences often came to light, there was a trend towards "privilege checking" or directly and immediately engaging peers who posit microaggressions:

> I have a lot of thoughts about that, because I feel like it's kind of both/and. On the one hand it's really important to the best of our abilities to learn how to call people out in a gracious way so that they can learn from the experience. And on the other hand I can recognize why people get to the point where they're so fed up that they just don't feel like they even have the energy, and the point isn't to educate, the point is just to be like, "You know what? You hurt me, I'm done." And I think that both of those are okay. And sometimes, if you're hand-holding someone too much, the impact isn't [pause] there isn't the necessity to change…. It's a super delicate dance of how do you get someone out of their place of comfort and into a space of realizing that they've hurt someone without getting them to the point where they just shut down and it's like, "I'm done, now I'm hurting and crying," and all the focus has been shifted.

The challenge incumbent to privilege checking as Char points out, is that the conversation can shift from the feelings of the student or group whose identity is the target of the microaggression, to feelings of hurt or questions of the intentionality of the majority actor in the situation. An alternate challenge is that dialogue simply ceases along with the potential for further development as the person criticized simply withdraws from the conversation.

Sometimes it is important to sit with disagreements, to reflect on one's own, and to continue engaging, seeking to find common ground where possible and be respectful

411

otherwise. "And even when we have to sit there and we have these disagreements or arguments in the Center about different views and takes on everything, at the end of the day you leave still friends with that person," explained Spryte. "And you go out and you work to still be friends with people who are doing those things to you." Skye had a similar observation. "Centers are supposed to be in a safe space, but a safe space doesn't mean everything's happy all the time, it just means we can actually acknowledge when mistakes happen and have a conversation about it." For Skye, approaching difference is about allowing people both space to make mistakes, to adjust their attitudes, and to take that next step in their development. She sees this as an essential role for herself as an agent of social change. "I've also really enjoyed getting to watch other students learn and grow and also whenever I'm at the Center I have an opportunity to intervene in situations and start constructive discussions around things."

Kent is a big believer in focusing on intentions, and giving people opportunity to evolve. "You can tell when people know better and when they don't. You can tell when someone's got venom and when they're actually going into with good intentions because they legitimately want to know and understand," he explains. "Other people have wronged me but I've wronged other people too. So it's more like a putting perspective on everything and realizing there's different perspectives."

Brett uses his own experiences as a lens and focus for initiating educational dialogue around difference. "At some point, I usually out myself. Because I'm usually talking about trans issues. And they're like 'I don't get it' or 'I don't understand how this makes sense'. And I'm like, 'All right, I'm gonna use myself as an example.'" He smiles as the turn in the conversation is realized, and the trick is revealed. "And then and it's like

you see this frozen moment where they're just like, 'Wait, how did you get in this room?'"

The surprise, more often than not, opens doors to further conversation and exploration as

Brett is able to open up about his journey and experience.

Tara practiced civility when encountering a religious group at a tabling event. She

feared the representatives might exhibit hostility or cause problems:

> I don't know how this happened but we got a table and it just happened to be right
> next to the group giving out free bibles, which was hilarious. What a convergence
> of awesomeness, right? And we started talking to them. I was like this is gonna be
> awkward. let's make it less awkward… It was me and another female that were
> right there next to them. And like, we were like, "We can do this. We can be
> nice." And, so we did.

Tara's choice was to engage with people she assumed to have a different

worldview or to avoid them. She introduced herself and explained her interest in creating

a fully welcoming and inclusive space for people on campus, and inquired about their

table and organization. She was right that the views of the groups were basically

incompatible, but "he was still very kind once he realized we were heathens, I think."

This was in contrast to an additional peer who actively approached the Bible table, and

saw individuals from the two tables engaging, so approached Tara's group as well. "At

one point, they compared homosexuality to rape and murder, and stealing which is what

you get a lot," Tara recalled, "And it was just [pause] it wasn't nice." In both cases,

conversation and dialogue were invited, and civility was employed as a strategy for

engaging across deeply held values of significant difference.

For Jordan, this sort of active engagement is essential to make real change.

Identity politics are important, and differences of perception and understanding within the

community are important to educate around and to address, but ultimately those are tiny

changes among people who generally already agree in many or most ways. "Are you performing your values or are you living them out?" Jordan challenges. Jordan distinguishes between enacting identity in an eager and all-encompassing way as described by emergent phases of many identity models to more sustained engagement "that necessitates you actually think about different people's perspectives, where they're coming from, and what do they need in order to grow and develop? If the goal is to be right, then that doesn't require any of that thought."

Jade discussed engaging across learning style differences as she co-planned a program with a peer. "I know for example, [M and I] worked on an event for the first time, and seeing the different ways that we go about planning an event and looking at it conceptually." She explained that "[M] takes her process a lot slower and she has much more of a passive facilitation approach than I do. I'm much more of a lecturer." Together they had to explore and determine how best to reach the audience and successfully convey the information that they were trying to articulate. Marcus had an experience with a student staff member that similarly pushed his boundaries. He attributes much of the progress made that year to her influence. "Yeah. She pushed us, I think, to think about things differently." Her agenda included expanding the scope of service of the Center to include interests of populations that were being underserved. Marcus recalled that "she and I had a lot of conversations about things that helped me grow, and I think together we were able to figure out how to help the Center grow."

Conclusion

Centers provide critical value for institutions as they contribute to student success through activities of advising and leadership development, advocacy, ally development,

provision of information, referral and resources, and assessment, as well as the ways that the create critical visibility for LGBTQ+ people on campus, create and develop community and counterspace, and provide specialized expertise around LGBTQ+ theory, practice and identity development. But students articulate and exhibit considerable gains in skills beyond those related specifically to identity development. Through three themes that emerged from the data analyzed for this study, participants explained how Center involvements helped them foster professionalism and the ability to work with others in productivity environments, develop strategies related to resilience and diminishing barriers to their achievement of desired goals and outcomes, and cultivating a social justice lens by understanding phenomena and tools of marginalization, as well as developing interpersonal capacities that facilitate overcoming it.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Through the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ students on three campuses, this study provides evidence of the essential value of LGBT Centers as they advocate for and empower LGBTQ+ students, create safe spaces where students are able to interact authentically and engage their identity development, and cultivate skills and strategies that help students overcome microaggressions, obstacles and barriers to their success. In particular, the study answers the following questions: what are historical and current contexts of LGBT Centers? What is the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students? Who are the Centers for and what purposes do they serve? What are the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation? What skills and strategies are taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity?

Chapter 8 will first consider the ways that the research questions were answered by the evidence collected and analysis conducted. Then conversation will turn to the study's major conclusions and recommendations, before suggestions for future research directions are posited.

Research Questions and Evidence

This research project coalesced around four questions. For each of the questions, a considerable body of evidence took shape through richly enacted traditions of qualitative

inquiry. Before turning to a discussion of major conclusions and recommendations brought forth through the collection and analysis of data, the research questions will be reviewed along with an explication of the ways each question was answered through the project.

The first question asked about the historical and current contexts of LGBT Centers. Chapter 2's literature review carefully considered the establishment of identity and culture centers on college campuses through the lens of racial identity, and initially in response to demands for inclusion and support by growing numbers of Black students. Campuses have continued to respond to the needs and interests of identity cohorts through the establishment of centers that extend beyond racial and ethnic identity, to other cohorts, such as those that target women and gender or veterans. Additional specific consideration was also given to the literature describing the development and evolution of LGBT Centers on campus. Chapters 4 and 5 described the cultures and contexts of three LGBT Centers, selected as research sites along with their campus climates. Chapter 6 described the purposeful ways that LGBT Centers serve their campuses and student constituents.

The second question asked about the nature of campus climate contexts for LGBTQ+ students. Chapter 1's statement of the problem provided a frame and definition for the consideration of campus climate, and considered Engleken's (1998) four pronged strategy for cultivating a supportive LGBTQ+ climate. It also afforded specific consideration to campus climate for transgender students and the specific and different climate experiences and needs of trans students. Chapter 5 considered the campus climate for LGBTQ+ students on three campuses selected as research sites. Evidence was

analyzed to describe, generally, spaces that include and spaces that marginalize students based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Further analysis was given to experiences of microaggression that LGBTQ+ students encounter on campus, and counterspaces whereby students are allowed to express themselves openly and authentically. Finally, Chapter 6 considered a number of LGBT Center functions that buffer and ameliorate barriers and obstacles encountered by LGBTQ+ students, and attempted to develop supportive campus climates and culture, such as activities grounded in: advocating for LGBTQ+ student needs and LGBTQ+ campus inclusion; educating LGBTQs and others through ally development; creating community and LGBTQ+ counterspace; offering specialized expertise around identity theory, LGBTQ+ student affairs practice and fostering student identity development; and fostering LGBTQ+ visibility. Finally, Chapter 7 considered the development of critical skills fostered through Center interactions and involvement that serve to develop resilience in students and act to counter negative aspects of climate that they encounter.

The third research question explored who Centers are for and what purposes they serve. Chapter 1's statement of the problem considered the very first LGBT Centers developed to address a growing awareness of marginalized sexual orientations and the evolving purpose that reflects today's broader consideration of multiple identities within the coalition of marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities. As Chapter 4 described the sites of research for this study, Chapter 5 described the ways that Centers provide direct services and support to students. A more thorough analysis of the question continued in Chapter 6, as the data explored evidence of the essential value of Centers through the lens of the roles and functions that they undertake in serving students and

campuses. Finally, Chapter 7 focused on purposive student skill development fostered through Center interaction and involvement.

The final question posited a set of related inquiries regarding the policies, programs, services and daily practices around advocacy and identity affirmation, as well as skills and strategies taught through Center interaction that help LGBTQ+ students mitigate microaggressions, obstacles and barriers related to identity. To answer the first part of the question, Chapter 6 used the data to describe nine essential Center functions that embody Center policies, programs, services and daily practices such as: advocating for LGBTQ+ student needs and LGBTQ+ campus inclusion; advising individuals and groups of students; developing leaders; educating LGBTQs and others through ally development; creating community and LGBTQ+ counterspace; offering specialized expertise around identity theory, LGBTQ+ student affairs practice and fostering student identity development; providing information, referral and resources; fostering LGBTQ+ visibility; and conducting assessment. The second part of the question was answered by Chapter 7 which articulates the development of three critical skill sets fostered through students' Center involvement: fostering professionalism; developing resilience; and cultivating a social justice lens.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Through the voices and experiences of LGBTQ+ student participants, this study provided overwhelming and incontrovertible evidence of the essential value that Centers provide for their campuses and for LGBTQ+ students by thoroughly answering the four research questions originally posited. Now conversation will turn to the study's major conclusions and recommendations, organized by chapter, before suggesting future

research directions.

Chapter 4 Research Sites and Chapter 5 Findings Regarding Campus Climate

Chapter 4 described the three LGBT Centers and campuses that served as sites for this research project. Data were collected through a number of qualitative modes of inquiry, including semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis. In Chapter 5, data were analyzed for themes that coalesced into descriptions of campus spaces that support and include students marginalized around sexual orientation and gender identity, and those that exclude them. Students' experiences of encountering microaggressions and creating counterspaces were also revealed. Chapter 5 reflected the following major conclusions: campus climates reflect both inclusionary and exclusionary practices; microaggressions are real and significant; and counterspaces are critical. Each conclusion is discussed further below.

Campus climates reflect both inclusionary and exclusionary practices. While campus enclaves of support exist for LGBTQ+ students, and may be growing in depth and breadth within institutions and society, sites of resistance and marginalization remain frequent, stubborn and persistent. This creates barriers and obstacles to LGBTQ+ students' full inclusion in the educational enterprise, and obstructs their paths to meeting institutional objectives for learning, development and persistence. Further, participants' daily experience of microaggressions suggests a generally hostile, harassing and intolerant environment can be frequently and unexpectedly encountered. Finally, experiences of inclusion and exclusion are not simply reflections of individual attitudes and behaviors, but are institutionalized in policies, practices and protocols of their campuses. This suggests that changes required to move towards more full inclusion

extend beyond engaging and educating individuals to considering the ways that marginalization is reflected by an institution's cultural assumptions, artifacts, rituals and symbols. The latter requires strategies of assessment and advocacy that are best applied through the lens of specialized expertise embodied by LGBT Centers and Center staff as campus change agents and ombuds.

Microaggressions are real and significant. Participants were able to articulate frequent and common experiences consistent with Sue's (2010) conceptualization of microaggressions, or daily indignities that demean, degrade and diminish individuals based on identity characteristics. The consequences of these microaggressions include psychological and physical stress and consequences to individuals, and create barriers and obstacles to full and sustained engagement in the educational enterprise. Chapter 4 highlighted that microaggressions are grounded in overt acts of intolerance that jeopardize the emotional and physical safety and well-being essential to student success, but are also characterized by erasure, or the imposition of identity by assumption onto an individual that presumes an identity or identity characteristics that feel restrictive, limiting or inauthentic. This experience of erasure can result in a dysphoria that alienates students from their lived experience, their physical bodies, their identity understandings, and real and fully realized relationships with others.

The research showed an additional microaggressive trend towards passive acceptance of differences around sexual orientation and gender identity by majority peers that is overtly apathetic to direct engagement or growth in and around said issues. For student participants, this felt akin to prior mindsets characterized by 'don't ask, don't tell' or directives not to "flaunt" LGBTQ+ identities. It's a live-and-let-live attitude with an

edge, and contributes to LGBTQ+ stress because while it brooks acceptance, it subtly reinscribes LGBTQ+ identities as both non-normative and unworthy of attention, discussion or understanding.

Additionally, the chapter revealed a number of methods that individuals use to respond to microaggressions that they encounter. Based on individual experiences and personality preferences, these strategies of coping are informally developed and cultivated as students interact, compare experiences and mentor one another. Centers serve the invaluable role of providing space for students to share, develop and cultivate skills that help them cope with microaggressions, and to gain resilience strategies that will serve them as they make and accomplish goals and objectives on campus and beyond campus.

Counterspaces are critical. The stress of navigating hostile campus environments is considerably draining for LGBTQ+ people who are often always on guard against impending and potential acts of hostility. Students therefore often seek and create counterspaces, free of the hostility and identity resistance endemic to other spaces. RSOs are spaces of support and serve an important purpose, but may not address intersectionality or give voice broadly to the students as they continue to develop and refine their own identities. RSOs and leaders need to be constantly challenged on inclusivity and creating counterspace for all students.

On campuses where RSOs are the only organized, resourced and visible source of support, students with multiple intersecting marginalized identities may experience elevated degrees of disenfranchisement depending on the cultures of those organizations. A Center presence can model and reinforce best practice and build a culture of

intentionality around intersectionality between LGBTQ+ identities and other intersecting identities. Yet Centers are not and cannot be the only campus spaces of acceptance and support. One of the critical roles of Centers must be the broad development and encouragement of physical and emotional counterspaces across campus.

Chapter 6 The Essential Value of LGBT Centers

Chapter 6 described the policies, programs, services and daily practices that embody the value that Centers contribute to campuses. Serving multiple simultaneous and congruent purposes on campus, and the needs of all students, faculty and staff, the data provided evidence that Centers work to create spaces where LGBTQ+ people are fully included in the educational enterprise. Data were collected through a number of qualitative modes of inquiry, including semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis. The data revealed that Center activities fall into two themes: those that primarily support core institutional practices of instruction, education, learning and research; and those that primarily further individual student outcomes. As differentiated by theme, Chapter 6 briefly discusses the value of these critical activities.

Supporting core practices: Instruction, education, learning and research. Aligning the Center's activities with core mission-aligned activities of the institution is valuable in helping to buffer operations and sustain resources committed to the support of LGBTQ+ inclusion through potential future periods of economic challenge and institutional contraction. The following activities of LGBT Centers contribute to core institutional purposes of instruction, education, learning and research.

Advocacy. Institutions are best served when they position and empower individuals to address and make progress around LGBTQ+ visibility, mission alignment and the creation of learning environments that build capacity around difference as reflected in increasingly multicultural and global communities of practice and spheres of interaction. The very existence of Centers is grounded in an inclusion and social change movement, and so activities that advocate for greater social justice, and for the needs of the LGBTQ+ students served individually and collectively by them are fundamental to their existence as well as to the progressive views and values that many institutions hold dear. Centers have a dual role in service to the institutional mission. First, by aligning Center activities with core mission outcomes, Centers create vital contributions that further mission goals through an LGBTQ+ inclusion lens. Second, Centers serve an ombuds role, to critique the inclusion practices to which institutions commit themselves, and to point out associated opportunities, progress and obstacles.

A primary advocacy activity of Centers is to consistently voice the institutional value of broad inclusion of students, faculty, staff and others who fall within the LGBTQ+ identity continuum. Keeping this value conversation central to the institution is a relatively complex prospect, because different constituencies may have nuanced understandings of the community, varying attention spans, and further because advocacy efforts may need to be specially framed to converge with the interests and evolving capacity of each of these institutional audiences. Further, as advocates for students who are unable to navigate institutional structures on their own, Center staff become trusted allies and stalwarts of support. There is also an institutional credibility that Center staff can leverage which might elude students as self-advocates.

Perhaps more than other groups that are constituted from coalitions drawn together through change movements, those cast as LGBTQ+ people may be less familiar with the unique experiences and perspectives of others who share that label than others. Even the common experience of marginalization and social stigmatization that binds the movement may be experienced in dramatically different ways for some groups within the identity coalition than others. A critical educational role for Centers is helping LGBTQ+ people to learn about themselves and their own identities, as well as about others within LGBTQ+ communities to foster self-advocacy and allyship among and between LGBTQ+ people.

Ally development. Leaders of social change movements grounded in securing equal rights for marginalized groups have long understood that progress and success for these movements are strongly associated with the movement's ability to engage and activate support from individuals from within majority groups who can serve as advocates and allies to the cause. These allies are often able to leverage social capital that exceeds the capacity of group members to create necessary change unassisted.

Likewise, as Centers seek to establish inclusive campus climates for LGBTQ+ students and others, cultivating campus support for the presence and contributions of LGBTQ+ people is essential. Ally development activities provide normative, accurate information to create a foundation for support of equality, and grows the coalition of people invested in equality and opportunity for LGBTQ+ people to catalyze progress on goals around inclusion.

Fostering visibility. Centers themselves are evidence that there is power in presence and visibility. LGBTQ+ and other identity centers are reminders of the commitment a campus has made to inclusion, and also serve to advocate for and direct that progress. They further serve to institutionalize the presence of marginalized and underrepresented people and legitimize their interests in and contributions to institutional dialogues and decisions.

Yet Center staff alone cannot effectively represent the interests of all LGBTQ+ identities and perspectives. Progress around LGBTQ+ inclusion is best served by the ongoing practice of including and empowering LGBTQ+ people in roles across the institution. Jordan and other Center leaders pointed to recruitment of faculty and staff with LGBTQ+ identities as a Center priority. Hiring LGBTQ+ faculty, administrators and staff, and recruiting LGBTQ+ students creates opportunities for those individuals, through the lens of their campus roles, experiences and expertise, to further inclusion goals at the center and margins of their responsibilities. It also extends the reach of LGBTQ+ perspectives in important ways to areas of the institution that Center staff may not have the ability to access.

In addition, resistance to full social participation of marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities is often buffered by normative experiences. Thus when majority people have positive interactions and experiences that include LGBTQ+ people, they are less likely to avoid future interactions with other LGBTQ+ people.

LGBT Centers become a physical embodiment and expression of LGBTQ+ visibility on campus, serving both as physical spaces that remind the campus community that LGBTQ+ people belong and are supported on the campus, as well as sponsoring

426

events and opportunities that draw out and explore LGBTQ+ culture and community. There is value in creating experiences that broadly engage the campus in support of LGBTQ+ people. Prominent celebrations and observances that show serious appreciation for the contributions of people with marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities serve multiple important purposes. First, these activities have the potential to introduce, inform and educate the entire campus about the history and struggle that forms a foundation for the LGBT Rights movement. They also validate and affirm the identities of existing LGBTQ+ people on the campus, and normalize the presence of LGBTQ+ people for majority peers while providing supportive peers and encouraging mentors. Finally, they allow the institution to live out the spirit and letter of policies and statements that promote equal treatment of people and welcome diverse perspectives that form and inform the best campus learning environments.

Centers have a core role in providing for visible structures of support for LGBTQ+ people on campus. However, Centers cannot be solo actors in living out the spirit and letter of policies and statements that promote equal treatment of people and in welcoming diverse perspectives that form and inform the best campus learning environments. Rather, Centers should participate in collaborations that target and support LGBTQ+ students and their needs across the institution.

Assessment. Center users and Center staff know that the services and activities that Centers provide create space for some students to persist who otherwise would not. They ease the burden for a number of other students who might persist alone despite the obstacles that are encountered on their campuses. And for others, Centers serve as a safe space where individuals are able to authentically express themselves in a context of

427

appreciation and acceptance, fostering identity efficacy and developing critical skill sets. Yet the bar for assessment is rising across operational units at institutions as their stakeholders demand evidence regarding claims made about institutional outcomes and the value of higher education.

Centers need to build capacity with assessment, and there would be value in moving collectively towards open source measures and metrics that describe and articulate the value and outcomes that Centers serve for students and campuses. These off the shelf solutions for showing and sharing value would help ameliorate some of the gap between current Center practice and the capacity necessary for engaged independent assessments of Center value.

Finally, graduate preparation programs and professional organizations need to maintain a focus on the development of skills and capacities around assessment, as well as foster analysis and presentation skills that effectively and efficiently tell our Center's data stories, highlight the successes and contributions of Centers to their campuses and create meaning for higher level campus decision-makers.

Furthering individual student outcomes. Beyond contributing to core mission-aligned activities of the institution, Center activities serve to support individual LGBTQ+ students in the pursuit of their educational aspirations and outcomes. The following activities of LGBT Centers contribute to furthering individual student outcomes.

Community and counterspace. Most physical spaces on campus reflect heteronormative cultural norms and expectations, leaving students with underrepresented sexual orientations and gender identities constantly guarding against microaggressions, emotional abuse and the threat or experience of violence (Vaccaro, 2012). The added

428

stress of navigating these hostile campus environments is considerably draining for

LGBTQ+ people. LGBT Centers provide a physical space, or counterspace, free of the

hostility and identity resistance endemic to other spaces. Counterspaces serve as

gathering places for people at the margins who often come together for mutual comfort

and support. Members engage in sharing of common experiences and in validating one

another's experience of oppression. This can serve to buffer the impact of

microaggressions, and foster the development of individual and collective strategies that

bolster resistance and resilience.

Renn's (2011) work notes that the high level cognitive work of learning is best

accomplished in the context of social affirmation and acceptance. Students whose

existence is characterized by outsiderness and a lack of belonging or feeling understood,

are less likely to meet and exceed their academic potential. Where majority students have

a better time of fitting into a campus structured to support them, underrepresented

students seek supportive counterspace and refuge from daily experiences of

microaggressions. Culture centers serve a critical and meaningful role as spaces of social

sanctuary. The presence of accessible counterspaces, such as LGBT Centers enable

individual students to persist and excel in environments hostile to them, including the

critical development of skills that buffer microaggressions and foster lifelong identity

resilience.

Specialized expertise. One of the most interesting outcomes of the research was

the way that the specialized expertise employed by Center staff around identity work was

drawn from three inter-related and catalyzing elements. Forming a sort of three-legged

stool of LGBTQ+ expertise, the three elements—theory expertise, practice expertise and

activities that foster identity development—focused on attending to the needs of students as whole people, addressing their individual complexity, and their needs in context. As institutions have grown, and the scale and scope of identity development has become better understood across domains of identity and experience, efforts to address the specific needs of individual students has required greater degrees of knowledge specialization among the staff charged with supporting them.

Theory expertise. Center staff make use of developmental theories to guide practice effectively, as they seek to meet the needs of the diverse students who seek assistance and support through Center interactions. Further, ongoing work with students reveals new and necessary pathways for growing theory-to-practice refinement consistent with identity marginalizations that are just coming to light—as more recent efforts to better address the needs of transgender students, asexual students, or those who occupy the reframed space of middle sexualities. Beyond the use of identity theory in direct service to students, programming, outreach, and planning efforts, Center staff must also position their work in the context of related social justice movements. Finally, to effectively meet the needs of students, the work of Centers must reflect and honor the intersectionalities embodied by their constituents.

Practice expertise. Additionally, as Centers serving the needs of students with marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities have come into existence and flourished on campuses, the staff within them have grown to embody a practice expertise around LGBTQ+ issues. As LGBTQ+ content experts, a primary expectation of Center staff is to understand the climate for and experience of LGBTQ+ students. Because LGBTQ+ students represent a broad range of identities, experiences and expressions,

maintaining an accurate sense of the climate and culture on campus is a process of constant refinement. Best practice for Centers around assessing campus climate necessitates the use of formal climate assessments undertaken at regular intervals, however, it also depends on meta-analysis of daily interactions with students, themselves, to provide for triangulation, and in which to ground this practice expertise, as Center staff listen to and understand the experiences and stories that students share. Doing so both richly enhances other climate data collected, and provides individuation that allows staff to provide targeted assistance and support to particular students who almost certainly experience the campus climate uniquely, dependent on their own personal circumstances. It also provides opportunities for Center staff to assess the needs of constituents.

Successful administrators also understand how to navigate the complex systems that comprise institutions of higher education to accomplish goals and get things done. They have shown efficacy and grown through leadership roles as students, and been seasoned to an even greater degree as staff. LGBT Center staff often bring their own marginalized sexual orientation or gender identity to the table, and have overcome identity-grounded institutional barriers to their own success – to wit, it is often this process of becoming and overcoming that motivates Center staff to undertake identity and social-justice work.

Finally, the practice of education around marginalized identities, particularly those grounded in sexual orientation and gender identity, is nuanced in ways that differentiate LGBT Center staff and the accompanying expertise, from others who also do identity work in other critical areas, or from staff who do general multi- or inter-cultural work, or practice student affairs in other ways. Knowledge of appropriate

431

terminology, cultural fluency and the ability to bridge knowledge to internal and external constituencies provides a unique space from which Center staff are able to act and interact.

Fostering identity development. For staff who work in LGBT Centers, and to degrees for other professionals who work with and advocate for LGBTQ+ communities, the nuanced identity expertise reflected by a thorough understanding of the collection of related developmental theories in the context of social justice and intersectionality, along with the practice expertise gained from working with LGBTQ+ individuals and the institutions, particularly higher education institutions, and institutional systems they encounter combine to create a unique and indispensable skill set that fosters growth and development of LGBTQ+ identity.

There is essential value in the role of LGBT Centers as they intentionally foster the development of comfortability and confidence congruent with LGBTQ+ identity self-efficacy, and a strong identity foundation and skill set from which to develop and attain educational and life goals and aspirations. Centers provide physical spaces and their activities provide environments where students can interact with one another and with professionals who have considerable expertise around sexual orientation and gender identity and associated developmental trajectories. Through these interactions and experiences, individuals are provided with opportunities to understand, explore and deepen their own developing sexual orientation and gender identity through a process of cognitive apprenticeship (Brandt, Farmer & Buckmaster, 1993; Merriam, Cafferella & Baumgartner, 2007). Cognitive apprenticeship patterns the acquisition of culture, knowledge and cultural practice and expression after craft apprenticeship practices. In

this way, individual identity self-efficacy is gained as identity and identity-related behaviors are articulated or modeled by others, with personal capacity gained first through coaching and scaffolding, then through personal exploration and cultural engagement, followed by individualized and self-directed learning, and ultimately resulting in a comfortability that fosters the ability to apprentice others.

Creating connections between individuals' intellectual understandings of their identity and identity development, and their lived experiences as LGBTQ+ people is an important outcome of developing identity self-efficacy. Favoring either lived experience or theoretical understanding may create or reinforce emotional distance that buffers painful identity-related experiences, but may also diminish associated growth opportunities and hinder the full development of personal capacities. Those who capture this balance between experience and understanding are more apt to see the ways that an awareness of their identity in the context of their experiences provides maximum opportunities for growth and self-enhancement. As a function of fostering identity self-efficacy, the spaces that Centers create for identity exploration must also be intersectional, and honor the multiple identities that influence, interact with and shape LGBTQ+ identity.

Advising. Advising activities often encompass a formal advising role associated with LGBTQ+-related student organizations, but extend further to the individual advisement of students around curricular and co-curricular choices. The advisement that takes place between Center staff and students extends beyond academic matters to include relationships and personal matters, all of which may ultimately affect classroom performance and student persistence. Students may also feel more comfortable opening

433

up to and sharing with someone who allows them to be fully authentic and whole in their identity.

Leadership development. LGBTQ+ people may feel disinclined to engage in leadership activities or institutions because of perceptions that existing leaders and leadership institutions have historically, and presently continue to actively work towards LGBTQ+ marginalization. For example, through their formative years, students have experienced efforts to enshrine the Constitution of the United States with language restricting marriage equality, and to successful efforts to accomplish the same in a majority of state constitutions. They have witnessed faith leaders calling from the pulpit for the social exclusion of LGBTQ+ people, and otherwise using clerical leadership voices to creating barriers within and among families and communities, and to encourage, incite or affirm violence and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people. In their schools, they have seen trusted teachers and administrators witness acts of LGBTQ+ intolerance, harassment and violence, while failing to respond, protect or defend, to any degree, the targets of sexual or gender identity-based resistance; rather educational leaders have been complicit or instigators of these exclusions, demanding that students conform to heteronormative assumptions and expression to participate in the educational enterprise or co-curricular experiences. And even in their daily lives, traditional social models such as doctors and police officers, have served to actively and passively resist marginalized sexual orientations and gender identities, by assumption, microaggression or acting as perpetrators of emotional disenfranchisement and physical violence.

As LGBTQ+ students have experienced leadership as manifest through these institutions, they may wonder why they would be persuaded to participate in and

434

perpetuate systems that are experienced as emotionally and physically harmful, detrimental and exhausting. Yet developing leadership capacity and skills within and among LGBTQ+ identified students has never been more critical as opportunities to dismantle heteronormative, binary and cisgendered systems of hegemony and oppression become more viable. An informed, skilled and prepared cohort of LGBTQ+ leaders is required to contribute to acts and activities of advocacy and democratic citizenship to further social change and progressive change. Such leadership is evident in the work of Center staff and directors, community activists and social change agents, and the everyday heroism embodied by people who live their lives out and proud, openly and authentically, creating change and inclusive environments in whatever spaces of work, social and cultural influence they encounter.

Students often engage in early leadership development by participating in social and advocacy organizations related to LGBTQ+ identity, and are often advised by or otherwise connected in these roles to Centers and Center staff. Gay-Straight Alliance, Queer Union, and Rainbow Advocates are all examples of groups that work to foster community and interaction among and between LGBTQ+ people and allies, to create opportunities for students to explore and develop identity understandings, to normalize and provide for queer-friendly and affirming spaces, and to advocate for inclusion. Other groups may intersect identity with other interests or passions–LGBT club sports or professional organizations, for instance–or offer particular cohorts opportunities to undertake more specific community work–as in the experience of identity collectives, QPOC groups or LGBTQ+ faith communities.

Providing information, referral and resources. An important role of Centers is to share information, to give referral to other campus and community services, and house and disseminate resources of importance to LGBTQ+ people. Centers depend on partnerships and collaborations to meet the varied needs of students and constituents because those needs often extend beyond the training, specialization and expertise of existing staff, because the volume of support demands exceed Center capacity to keep up without assistance, and because engaging others in the support enterprise fosters broader investment in outcomes related to LGBTQ+ student success.

Because LGBTQ+ people have often encountered identity resistance, and been subject to social meta-narratives that have engaged in misinformation about LGBTQ+ existence and experience to reinforce existing social structures and further marginalize those with minority sexual orientations and gender identities, LGBTQ+ people are wary of the veracity of information that pertains to them, or upon which they depend to make informed decisions. Often, LGBTQ+ people turn to institutions that specifically serve and support them to gather information they need. Centers must often provide a broad spectrum of information and resources, vetted for truth-value, and reflecting topics directly related to wellness aspects of identity, such as health, sexual health, and normalcy, to those related to identity advocacy, informing of local, regional and national action around political and legal intersections of identity, and finally to topics only tangentially connected to identity, such as those related to experiences or processes of course or major selection, or the ways that students navigate classroom and out-of-classroom environments. Students rely on Center staff to help connect them to answers because of the existing trusting relationships that have been developed, and because staff

can help answer those questions through a lens that attends to LGBTQ+ experiences.

Chapter 7 The Center's Role in Developing Critical Skills

Beyond those activities specifically related to LGBTQ+ identity and the support of those marginalized based on sexual orientation and gender identity, Centers contribute significantly to the development of capacities and skills in students that transcend identity work and development. In particular, participants discussed ways that Center participation fostered professionalism and the ability to work with others in productivity environments. Participants also explored the development of resilience, or strategies that they employ to overcome obstacles to their achievement of desired goals and outcomes. Finally, participants discussed the ways Center involvement cultivated a social justice lens, which participants used to buffer, interpret and understand encounters and interactions with other individuals and experiences of the world.

Fostering professionalism. Spaces created by Centers, both the physical space that they occupy, as well as the psychic space embodied in their communities, organizations, programs and activities are most often interactive group spaces. Even a person's identity, work marked and measured by individual progress, is produced through conversation, exploration and mentorship that is only rarely isolated or solitary. In these group spaces, individuals encounter themselves and others, and ideas that support and challenge their existing frameworks of understanding. They often seek to make change to themselves and their environments through organized group efforts and initiatives. Much of this work requires combined endeavors that emerge from work and organizational teams, formal and informal groups, and coalitions and collaborations derived from interest convergence. Through their Center participation, students identified growing in

437

skills such as: communication; teamwork and managing others; problem solving; program planning; strategic thinking and change management; and practicing advocacy within organizational constraints and hierarchies.

Developing resilience. Developing identity self-efficacy, and moving toward one's goals and objectives as an LGBTQ+ person means confronting and overcoming barriers to one's existence, inclusion, and success. The concept of resilience describes strategies that individuals employ to overcome these obstacles to the achievement of desired outcomes. While resilience is often associated with identity work and development because one's cultural marginalization requires that existence itself is a daily embodiment of resilience, the skills associated with overcoming adversity and persisting through resistance are transferable to efforts associated with many problems that are confronted or goals that are set. Participants in this research discussed considerable ways that they employed strategies of resilience, such as: code switching, seeking alternate perspectives, coping with microaggressions, cultivating self-advocacy skills; and embracing self-love.

Cultivating a social justice lens. A final skill set that participants related developing was the ability to see and respond to the world through a social justice lens, which participants used to buffer, interpret and understand encounters and interactions with other individuals and experiences of the world. Individuals explained how they employed a social justice lens as they identified inequities, and showed an awareness of intersectionality as they experienced and made sense of systems of oppression. A social justice lens also invited action appropriate to making desired cultural change. Participants were activated to show empathy, to engage across difference, and to employ bystander

438

behaviors in interactions characterized by marginalization. Interpreting the world through a social justice framework affords marginalized individuals the ability to experience and understand their own social exclusion and that of other marginalized people.

Implications for Practitioners

Beyond outcomes articulated through participant experiences in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, analysis led to implications for practice that were more generalized based on the researcher's engagement with the data.

Labels are not the problem. As I would describe this work to those involved in Center work and practitioners more broadly, I would hear colleagues often observe that current students are resistant to identity labels, such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or queer, and this accounted for the acronym inflation taking place within the loose coalition of those with marginalized sexual or gender identities and described by LGBTQ+ or its variations. My exploration revealed this causality to be essentially inaccurate. Students aren't resistant to labels; they are resistant to assumptions and erasure, or to labels that fail to describe them fully and accurately. The vocabulary of identity, and our individual and social understandings of sexual orientation, gender identity, and the complexity of human experience demand that we speak about, learn about and respect the ways that we know ourselves and others. To persist in the use of inaccurate or assumptive terms disrespects the exploration we encourage and the full and authentic embodiment of identity that we promote. Allowing people the freedom to choose their labels and describe themselves more fully is respectful and sheds light on the range and fullness of human experience in ways that creates openness, visibility and ever-greater places and spaces of acceptance.

The "plus" is the place. Through the research, student participants were asked to articulate their sexual orientations and gender identities, and the ways that they answered this question showed just how personal and nuanced self-understandings around sexual orientation and gender identity are growing, and also the degree to which major archetypes or existing identity labels fail in their attempts to describe commonalities. Indeed, identities that fall within the "plus" of the LGBTQ+ continuum continue to manifest, and students continue to live their lives and evolve our language and understanding in ground-breaking ways. It is exciting to see this freedom from pre-existing social conceptions and restraints, but it also requires that Center staff and LGBTQ+-serving entities engage frequently and deeply with constituents to maintain currency and remain relevant in the provision of services and supports.

Centers evolve to maintain relevance. From the earliest Centers established to advocate for the inclusion of gays and lesbians, Centers have evolved their practice to meet the evolving cultures of institutions, society and students across the LGBTQ+ continuum of identities. While social acceptance of some identities grows stronger, new ways of knowing and being emerge and evolve, and Centers must continually seek to understand the needs of students who embody them. It also requires that Centers constantly evaluate and re-evaluate campus climate as it relates to current understandings. A campus climate that grows safer for students who embody traditional conceptualizations of gay or lesbian identity may not be safe to students who are gender non-conforming, fluid, or even those whose expression of traditional identities transgresses social acceptability or expectation. As the margins grow more centered, and new territories are identified at the margins, Centers and Center staff must remain vigilant

440

that Centers serve to protect all that fall within the LGBTQ+ spectrum, and to honor that our understanding of the "plus" is constantly evolving.

Campus climate must be understood and addressed. Efforts that facilitate the active inclusion of LGBTQ+ people may or may not align with the mission and purpose of every institution. Yet people with marginalized sexual and gender identities are ubiquitously present on campuses, even those whose climates are overtly hostile to LGBTQ+ people or whose missions and communities are grounded in values that exclude or further LGBTQ+ marginalization. Yet most campuses seek to promote the success of students and the full realization of their individual identities, talents, capacities and potentials. While LGBTQ+ people may experience microaggressions anywhere, it is important that campuses regularly and thoroughly seek to understand their own climates for and experiences of LGBTQ+ people, and then act on that information to address policy and redress practice that furthers isolation, silence, exclusion or harms to LGBTQ+ people. Further, campuses must be aware of those who are multiply marginalized through intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity and additional salient identity characteristics such as race which create additional vulnerabilities and increase potentials for microaggression and harm. Thus as understandings of identity evolve, so must our campus awareness grow with it, and therefore inviting regular and cyclical assessment of campus climate is essential to inclusion efforts.

Campuses must create counterspace. Beyond understanding the campus climate for LGBTQ+ people, it is the responsibility of campuses to act on the outcomes of this research and the body of supporting evidence that notes how critical the creation of counterspace is for the development of identity for marginalized campus cohorts, such as

441

those with LGBTQ+ identities. The creation and support of an LGBT Resource Center provides such a counterspace, and creates essential value for students and for the campus, as articulated in the outcomes of this study. It would be ideal for every campus to offer a rich and robust space dedicated to the exploration of sexual and gender identity, and the support of students within the LGBTQ+ community. Yet factors such as campus size, resource availability, competing needs and priorities, history, politics, and others may restrict a dedicated and resourced Center.

Yet every campus has the capacity to create counterspace. Counterspace may be physical or emotional, often both, but situates support and resources, encourages resilience and authenticity, and gives students a space free of microaggressions and normative social pressures and expectations. Ally programs or other collectives of like minded and supportive individuals can be developed and supported on every campus, and should be a minimum standard of counterspace as institutions work to further develop, cultivate and encourage additional critical counterspaces such that every student who has the need to be accepted, embraced and supported is able to find a meaningful connection.

Scrutinize bias in leadership pipelines. Marginalized people often come to the work of advocacy and social justice, including engagement in the work of LGBT Resource Centers, to find a congruence between personal experiences, strongly held individual and professional values and a desire to find meaningful work that contributes to social justice and social change. Yet research shows that staff who gain professional skills and efficacy through these activities later struggle to advance beyond identity-based or cultural leadership positions (Sutton & McCluskey-Titus, 2010). It is unclear if advancement challenges reflect a bias towards the work and higher level leadership

442

understanding of its significance and skill transferability to other and broader leadership opportunities, towards the marginalized identities of the individuals themselves, or a misguided belief that those involved as critical advocates and cultural leaders are somehow indispensable from their current roles. More research and reflection needs to take place regarding how and why these leadership positions fail to create channels and pipelines to contribute to essential diversity of people and practice at the highest levels of student affairs and institutional leadership.

Unique populations require specialization. Lloyd-Jones and Smith (1954) "decried the way the student affairs profession was emulating large, impersonal, specialized organizations" in the landmark work *Student Personnel Work as Deeper Teaching*. Pushing back hard against an institutional trend towards support offices and areas that targeted cohorts of students based on unique identity characteristics, rather than attending to students individually in all spheres as whole and complex individuals, practitioners were cautioned that over-specialization within student affairs would distract from the ability of practitioners to see and work with students holistically.

It is a debate that continues six decades later, yet this research and its outcomes support the notion that understandings of identity are complex (and work around LGBTQ+ identity shows a trend towards more nuance and complexity), and student needs are so great that specialized efforts and expertise is required to support and encourage students' resilience and persistence in campus communities whose norms, practices and environments have incredible range–from hostile to neutral to supportive. Specialized supports such as LGBT Resource Centers, and the cultural fluency embodied by staff within them, can serve to bolster and reinforce personal efficacy and individual

skill and capacity to overcome obstacles and achieve critical educational and personal outcomes.

The high bar for cultural fluency. A critical attribute of successful Center work is the cultural fluency of Center staff and constituents. Because understandings of sexual orientation and gender identity are constantly evolving and the LGBTQ+ acronym expands to include developing identities and those increasing in visibility, it is essential that those responsible for Centers engage in regular and frequent educational experiences and professional development to maintain accurate and valuable conceptions, but also to constantly triangulate the campus and broader culture for LGBTQ+ people, to hear and reflect on experiences of self and students, and consider modes and methods by which the Center practices its mission and purposes. Further, critical intersections of identity such as race create even more nuance and require individualized attention and specialized expertise as students who are multiply marginalized seek support, counterspace and staff who understand their unique experiences and needs. Finally, Center staff must simultaneously work to promote and maintain a suitable level of knowledge, skill and cultural competence among articulated campus support constituencies and across student service areas such that resistance can be identified and addressed, and supports refined and refreshed.

The research's discussion of cognitive apprenticeships is of significant value in thinking about this ongoing development of cultural fluency across campus. The role of Centers and Center staff is considerable, and needs often exceed available resources. Employing a cognitive apprenticeship model that cultivates and extends educational capacity within the campus community such that individual contact between and among

its members results in a constant and broad-based developmental network, with expertise then conveyed from member to member both formally and informally creates incredible value in moving forward the work and outcomes of Centers, as well as meeting the demand for ongoing development around cultural fluency across characteristics of identity and difference, but of critical importance to LGBTQ+ people and communities.

Finally, the critical importance of cultural fluency demands that attention and consideration is given to the ways that graduate preparation programs think about the education and development of student affairs practitioners. Thinking of cultural development as a theoretical subset within frameworks of student development theory may not give enough time, attention or value to the role and impact it plays in students' experience and success. Preparation programs that combine student development theory with aspects of skill development around cultural fluency and the ability of practitioners to attend to and meet the unique needs of students that are bound up with identity and intersectionality, may be well served to revisit the model and consider a broader range of experiential, skill and program outcomes that disaggregate and parse student development theory from cultural fluency.

The work remains personal. From those early moments of interest that led me to research that described the value of Centers that might have supported my own sexual orientation and gender identity development in critical ways, to the activities of bracketing and introspection that buffered my analysis, observations and conclusions, to my intense desire to honor the voices and contributions of my participants, I was reminded at each critical milestone of the project that this work is, in the words of Audre Lorde, as intensely personal as it is political.

The process has left me satisfied, but not comfortable. I remain restless in my desire to see progress towards full inclusion for marginalized and under-represented people on campus and to work as an advocate for social change through my positions on campus. The process has also left me reflective of my own positionality in the research, and to question the ways that my participants responded to my own positionality as a white gay man whose age and educational background lends authority, whose writing, speech and perspective is inescapably grounded in the power and culture of Whiteness. I honor what was shared by my participants, and I am emotionally moved by their deeply personal stories and disclosures, and yet I can't help but consider what remained unsaid, and the cultural barriers to connection and communication that remained firmly entrenched by our differences. The negative can't be proved or argued, but it can be questioned, and as I further the research, I will continue to ask and explore how I can be more fully accessible and inclusive, in my data gathering and observations, my analysis and conclusions, and in my discourse and sharing. There is agency and potential that exists in turning the critical eye inwards, and interrogating the past, present and future self, and I have a continued obligation to ask no less of myself than I do of those people, systems and cultures that I encounter and scrutinize through the work.

Future Research

This study provides incontrovertible evidence of the value of LGBT Centers to the students they serve on the campuses that served as sites of research. Yet one of the limitations of the project is that it draws participants from those students who had an existing relationship with and affinity for the Center on their campus. It does not include or attempt to understand the voices and perspectives of LGBTQ+ people who haven't

446

made a connection with the LGBT Center, and therefore is limited in describing the experience of LGBTQ+ people broadly across any particular research site. An opportunity for study would be to consider LGBTQ+ students who are not closely aligned with Centers. In particular research might consider LGBTQ+ people who are unassociated with Centers because they are independently supported in their identity journey in other ways. There may be value in understanding the modes and methods of support that these students engage such that mutual and mutually-supportive collaborations might be explored between LGBT Centers and other LGBTQ+-supporting entities on campus.

Additionally, research may consider the experiences of invisible beneficiaries of Center activities, or students who don't access Center services directly, but collect indirect benefits from their presence on campus. This might include LGBTQ+-identified students, as well as students who identify within heteronormative identities.

An additional cohort that might warrant research interest are students who are disconnected from Centers because sexual identity is not a primary identity for them or does not take priority in their developmental explorations. Understanding the developmental trajectories and journeys of students who may or may not need support, or have the self-awareness to know they may or may not need support could be fascinating.

Finally, consideration could be given to students whose behavior might fall within LGBTQ+ identity frameworks, but whose self-understandings remain anchored in heteronormative traditions. For example, equality movements might benefit from empathy development among students who engage in "bro behavior" or dabble in heteroflexibility, but who would not ultimately assume or accept a non-heterosexual

personal identity. There may be a role for Centers in reaching out to, educating and facilitating development among these students and others like them, particularly in the context of emerging identities.

In addition to the ways that Centers engage and connect, or fail to, with potential cohorts of students who might be served by them, the research would benefit from continued examination of the ways we parse and examine students through the lens of identity. Garvey and Rankin (2015) recently used gender conformity as the unit of analysis for participants in a research study on campus climate for LGBTQ+ students. New and thoughtful approaches to the ways that sexual orientation and gender identity are understood in our analysis of student experience will help to provide the best service to students.

Finally, additional research on the concept of outness could be beneficial. Perceptions about the ease and age at which people are coming out seem to suggest that risks are far diminished from what they once were. This may be true, but there may be a significant gap between the real and perceived risks of coming out for an individual across contexts. Further, the experience of coming out may need to be unpacked as it moves beyond more socially acceptable sexual orientations and gender identities to those that are more socially transgressive. Additionally, there may be some research opportunity in considering how students come out to themselves and others as their identities develop, emerge and evolve, and how those coming out experiences may be different across disclosures.

REFERENCES

Abes, E. S. (2007). Applying queer theory in practice with college students: Transformation of a researcher's and participant's perspectives on identity, a case study. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 5*(1), 57-77. doi:10.1300/j524v05n01_06

Abes, E. S., Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2007). Reconceptualizing the model of multiple dimensions of identity: The role of meaning-making capacity in the construction of multiple identities. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(1), 1-22.

Abes, E. S., & Kasch, D. (2007). Using queer theory to explore Lesbian college students' multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development, 48*(6), 619-636.

American College Personnel Association. (1996). *The student learning imperative: Implications for student affairs*. Washington, D.C.: Author.

Bandura, A. (1994). Self-efficacy. In V. S. Ramachaudran (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of human behavior* (pp. 71-81). New York, NY: Academic Press.

Beemyn, G., & Rankin, S. (2011). *The lives of Transgender people* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Bers, T., & Swing, R. L. (2010). Championing the assessment of learning: The role of top leaders. In G. L. Kramer, & R. L. Swing (Eds.), *Higher Education assessments: Leadership matters* (1st ed., pp. 3-26). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bilodeau. (2005). Beyond the gender binary: A case study of two transgender students at a Midwestern research university. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education, 3*(1), 29-44. doi:10.1300.j367v03n01_05

Bilodeau, B. L., & Renn, K. A. (2005). Analysis of LGBT identity development models and implications for practice. *New Directions for Student Services, Fall*(111), 25-39.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2008). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Bramley, M. F. (2009). *Cultural centers and students: Are the diversity needs of students being met?* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses

449

database. (AAT 1467501)

Brandt, B. L., Farmer, J. A., & Buckmaster, A. (1993). Cognitive apprenticeship approach to helping adults learn. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, Autumn*(49), 69-78. doi:10.1002/ace.36719935909

Broido, E. M. (2004). Understanding diversity in Millennial students. *New Directions for Student Services, 106*(3), 73-85.

Buford, C. (1988). Multicultural programming in a university Women's center. *Initiatives, 51*(2-3), 31-35.

Bullough, V. L. (1998). Alfred Kinsey and the Kinsey report: Historical overview and lasting contributions. *The Journal of Sex Research, 35*(2), 127-131.

Byrne, K. Z. (2000). The role of campus-based Women's centers. *Feminist Teacher, 13*(1), 48-61.

Case, A. D., & Hunter, C. D. (2012). Counterspaces: A unit of analysis for understanding the role of settings in marginalized individuals' adaptive responses to oppression. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 50*(1/2), 257-270. doi:10.1007/s10464-012-9497-7

Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality, 4*, 219-235.

Cass, V. C. (1984). Homosexual identity: A concept in need of a definition. In J. P. Cecco, & M. G. Shively (Eds.), *Bisexual and Homosexual identities: Critical theoretical issues* (pp. 105-126). New York, NY: Haworth Press.

Castagno, A. E., & Lee, S. J. (2007). Native mascots and ethnic fraud in Higher Education: Using Tribal Critical Race Theory and the interest convergence principle as an analytic tool. *Equity & Excellence in Education, 401*(1), 3-13. doi:10.1080/10665680601057288

Caudle, S. L. (2004). Qualitative data analysis. In H. P. Hatry, J. S. Wholey & K. E. Newcomer (Eds.), *Handbook of practical program evaluation* (pp. 417-438). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Chickering, A. W. (1969). *Education and identity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals Inc. (2012). *Mission statement.* Retrieved March 24, 2013, from http://lgbtcampus.memberclicks.net/mission-statement

Creswell, J. W. (2007). Specifying a purpose and research questions or hypotheses. In J. W. Creswell (Ed.), *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating*

quantitative and qualitative research (3rd ed., pp. 120-149). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

Dana, N. F., Dana, T. M., Kelsay, K. L., Thomas, D., & Tippins, D. J. (1992). Qualitative interviewing and the art of questioning: Promises, possibilities, problems and pitfalls. *Qualitative Research in Education Conference,* Athens, GA. 3-14.

D'Augelli, A. R. (1994). Identity development and sexual orientation: Toward a model of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual development. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts & D. Birman (Eds.), *Human diversity: Perspectives on people in context* (1st ed., pp. 312-333). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dilley, P. (2000). Conducing successful interviews: Tips for intrepid research. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 131-137.

Dilley, P. (2002). 20th Century postsecondary practices and policies to control Gay students. *The Review of Higher Education, 25*(4), 409-431. doi:10.1353/rhe.2002.0018

Dirks, D. A. (2011). *Transgender people on university campuses: A policy discourse analysis.* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3496355)

Dixon, S. (2010). *A case for Men's centers on college campuses. (*Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1484291)

Durley, G. L. (1969). A center for Black students on university campuses. *Journal of Higher Education, 40*(6), 473-476.

Engelken, L. C. (1998). Making meaning: Providing tools for an integrated identity. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 23-30). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Fassinger, R. (1998). Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual identity and student development theory. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 13-22). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Fine, L. E. (2012). The context of creating space: Assessing the likelihood of college LGBT center presence. *Journal of College Student Development, 53*(2), 285-299. doi:10.1353/csd.2012.0017

Francis, L. C., & Kraus, A. (2012). Developing a student veterans center: The confluence

451

of academic and military cultures. *About Campus, 17*(4), 11-14.

Garvey, J., & Rankin, S. R. (2015). Making the grade? Classroom climate for LGBTQ students across gender conformity. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 52*(2), 190-203. doi:10.1080/19496591.2015.1019764

Gilligan, C. (1977). In a different voice: Women's conceptions of self and of morality. *Harvard Educational Review, 47*(4), 481-517.

Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Gortmaker, V., & Brown, R. D. (2006). Out of the closet: Differences in perceptions and experiences among out lesbian and gay students. *College Student Journal, 40*(3), 606-619.

Gray, P. J. (2010). Assessment that transforms an institution. In G. L. Kramer, & R. L. Swing (Eds.), *Higher Education assessments: Leadership matters* (1st ed., pp. 179-212). New York, NY: Rowman & Littlefield.

Grier-Reed, T. L. (2010). The African American student network: Creating sanctuaries and counterspaces for coping with racial microaggressions in Higher Education settings. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development, 49*(3), 181-188.

Hardiman, R., & Jackson, B. W. (1992). Racial identity development: Understanding racial dynamics in college classrooms and on campus. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning, 53*, 21-37.

Hefner, D. (2002). Black cultural centers: Standing on shaky ground? *Black Issues in Higher Education, 18*(26), 22-30.

Helms, J. E. (1990). Toward a model of white racial identity development. *Black and white racial identity: Theory, research and practice* (pp. 49-66). New York, NY: Greenwood Press.

Huba, M. E., & Freed, J. E. (2000). *Learner-centered assessment on college campuses: Shifting the focus from teaching to learning*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Huber, L. P., & Cueva, B. M. (2012). Chicana/Latina testimonios on effects and responses to microaggressions. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 45*(3), 392-410. doi:10.1080/10665684.2012.698193

Jones, S. R., & McEwen, M. K. (2000). A conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. *Journal of College Student Development, 41*(4), 405-414.

Josselson, R. (1987). *Finding herself. Pathways to identity development in Women*. San

Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Kasper, B. (2004). Campus-based Women's centers: Administration, structure, and resources. *NASPA Journal, 41*(3), 487-499.

Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages* (Second ed.). San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row.

Lees, L. J. (1998). Transgender students on our campuses. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 37-43). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Levin, H., & Evans, N. J. (1991). The development of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual identities. In N. J. Evans, & V. A. Wall (Eds.), *Beyond tolerance: Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals on campus* (pp. 1-24). Craigandria, VA: American College Personnel Association.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1994). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In J. S. Stark, & A. Thomas (Eds.), *Assessment and program evaluation (ASHE reader series)* (pp. 651-657). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Liu, W. M., Cuyjet, M. J., & Lee, S. (2010). Asian American student involvement in Asian American culture centers. In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in Higher Education* (1st ed., pp. 26-48). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Lloyd-Jones, E., & Smith, M. R. (Eds.). (1954). *Student personnel work as deeper teaching* (First ed.). New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.

Lozano, A. (2010). Latina/o culture centers: Providing a sense of belonging and promoting student success. In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in Higher Education* (1st ed., pp. 3-26). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Lucozzi, E. A. (1998). A far better place: Institutions as allies. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 47-52). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Magolda, M. B. (2004). *Making their own way*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Mallory, S. L. (1998). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender student organizations: An overview. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 321-328). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2000). *Research in education: A conceptual introduction* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Allyn & Bacon.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., Caffarella, R. S., & Baumgartner, L. M. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (Third ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Michigan Messenger, The. (2007, November 22). HRC abandons principles on ENDA. *The Michigan Messenger,* pp. 1.

Nadal, K. L., Issa, M., Leon, J., Meterko, V., Wideman, M., & Wong, Y. (2011). Sexual orientation microaggressions: "death by a thousand cuts" for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 8*, 234-259. doi:10.1080/19361653.2011.584204

National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, & American College Personnel Association. (2004). In Keeling R. P. (Ed.), *Learning reconsidered: A campus-wide focus on the student experience*. Washington, DC: National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

Nunez, A. (2011). Counterspaces and connections in college transitions: First-generation Latino students' perspectives on Chicano studies. *Journal of College Student Development, 52*(6), 639-655.

O'Brien, K. M. (1998). The people in between: Understanding the needs of Bisexual students. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 31-35). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Osborne, N. J. (2010). *Building a new type of undergraduate male community: Program evaluation & advocacy of college-based men's groups & men's resource center for gender equity, leadership, & service.* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3444092)

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1991). *How college affects students: Findings and insights from twenty years of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (2005). *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Patton, L. D. (2006a). Black culture centers: Still central to student learning. *About Campus, 3*, 2-8.

Patton, L. D. (2006b). The voice of reason: A qualitative examination of Black student perceptions of Black culture centers. *Journal of College Student Development, 47*(6), 628-646. doi:10.1353/csd.2006.0068

Patton, L. D. (2010). An examination of the successful strategies and positive student

outcomes of two Black culture centers. In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in higher education* (1st ed., pp. 63-74). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Patton, L. D. (2011). Promoting critical conversations about identity centers. In P. M. Magolda, & M. B. Magolda (Eds.), *Contested issues in student affairs: Diverse perspectives and respectful dialogue* (1st ed., pp. 255-260). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Perry, W. (1970). *Forms of intellectual and ethical development in the college years: A scheme*. New York, NY: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston.

Peshkin, A. (1998). In search of subjectivity. One's own. *Educational Researcher, October*(7), 17-21.

Peterson, M. W., & Spencer, M. G. (2000). Understanding academic culture and climate. In M. C. Brown II (Ed.), *ASHE reader series: Organization and governance in Higher Education* (Fifth ed., pp. 170-181). Boston, MA: Jossey-Bass.

Phinney, J. S. (1993). A three-stage model of ethnic identity development in adolescence. In M. E. Bernal, & G. P. Knight (Eds.), *Ethnic identity: Formation and Transmission among Hispanics and other minorities* (pp. 61-79). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Porter, J. D. (1998). Leadership development for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender college students. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 307-319). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Princes, C. D. (1994). The precarious question of Black cultural centers versus multicultural centers. *Annual Conference of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education,* Harrisburg, PA. 1-36.

Rankin, S. (2003). *Campus climate for LGBT people: A national perspective*. New York, NY: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute.

Reason, R. D., Terenzini, P. T., & Domingo, R. J. (2006). First things first: Developing academic competence in the first year of college. *Research in Higher Education, 47*(2), 149-175. doi:doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-8884-4

Renn, K. A. (2011). Identity centers: An idea whose time has come...and gone? In P. M. Magolda, & M. B. Magolda (Eds.), *Contested issues in student affairs: Diverse perspectives and respectful dialogue* (1st ed., pp. 244-254). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Revilla, A. T. (2010). Raza Womyn–Making it safe to be queer: Student organizations as retention tools in higher education. *Black Women, Gender, and Families, 4*(1), 37-60.

Richardson, A. (1957). The assimilation of British migrants in Australia. *Human*

455

Relations, 10, 157-165.

Ryan, R. (2005). The evolution of an LGBT center at a public institution. *New Directions for Student Services, Fall*(111), 71-74.

Sanlo, R. L. (2000). The LGBT campus resource center director: The new profession in student affairs. *NASPA Journal, 37*(3), 485-495.

Sanlo, R., Rankin, S., & Schoenberg, R. (2002). In Sanlo R., Rankin S. and Schoenberg R. (Eds.), *Our place on campus: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender services and programs in Higher Education* (1st ed.). United States: Greenwood Press.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community.*48*(Winter), 5-15.

Schwartz, J. (2014). Classrooms of spatial justice: Counter-spaces and young men of color in a GED program. *Adult Education Quarterly, 64*(2), 110-127. doi:10.1177/0741713613513632

Shotton, H. J., Yellowfish, S., & Cintron, R. (2010). The role of an American Indian culture center. In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in Higher Education* (1st ed., pp. 49-62). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Skipper, T. L. (2005). *Student development in the first college year: A primer for college educators*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical Race Theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education, 69*(1/2), 60-73.

Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 435-454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Steinour, H. (2013). *College campus based resource centers: Trans-friendly or trans-ambivalent.* (Master's thesis). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 1529700)

Stevens, R. A. (2004). Understanding Gay identity development within the college environment. *Journal of College Student Development, 45*(2), 185-206. doi:10.1353/csd.2004.0028

Strauss, A. C., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques for developing a grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender and sexual orientation* (1st ed.). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons

Sullivan, P. (1998). Sexual identity development: The importance of target or dominant group membership. In R. L. Sanlo (Ed.), *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender college students: A handbook for faculty and administrators* (1st ed., pp. 3-12). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Suskie, L. (2009). *Assessing student learning* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Sutton, E. M., & McCluskey-Titus, P. A. (2010). Campus culture center directors' perspectives on advancement. In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in Higher Education* (1st ed., pp. 157-177). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Taft, R. (1957). A psychological theory for the study of social assimilation. *Human Relations, 10*, 141-156.

Thelin, J. R. (2004). *A history of American Higher Education*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Troiden, R. R. (1989). The formation of Homosexual identities. *Journal of Homosexuality, 17*(1), 43-73.

Umbach, P. D., & Kuh, G. D. (2006). Student experiences with diversity at liberal arts colleges: Another claim for distinctiveness. *Journal of Higher Education, 77*(1), 169-192. doi:10.1353/jhe.2006.008

Vaccaro, A. (2012). Campus microclimates for LGBT faculty, staff, and students: An exploration of the intersections of social identity and campus roles. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 49*(4), 429-446. doi:10.1515/jsarp-2012-6473

Vogt, W. P. (2007). *Quantitative research methods for professionals*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Yosso, T. J., & Lopez, C. B. (2010). Counterspaces in a hostile space: A Critical Race Theory analysis of campus culture centers. In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in higher education* (1st ed., pp. 83-104). Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Yosso, T. J., Smith, W. A., Ceja, M., & Solorzano, D. G. (2009). Critical Race Theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review, 79*(4), 659-690.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF CENTER DIRECTORS AND STAFF

1.   Which of the following center activities, including those identified by (Sanlo et al., 2002), are currently supported in the mission and purposes of your center?
2.   To what degree is each activity essential to achieving your mission and purposes.
- crisis intervention
- course instruction
- student organization advising
- coordination of LGBT speakers, trainers and performers
- consultation services with students
- consultation services with faculty
- consultation services with staff
- consultation services with others
- facilitation of campus discussion groups about identity and experience
- facilitation of campus discussion groups about LGBT people, social justice and social change
- assessment
- research
- community service and civic engagement
- communications include website and social media management
- library services, including coordination with campus libraries
- maintenance of library materials within the center itself
- informal interaction with center-associated students
- leadership development
- alumni outreach
- fundraising or development activities
- supervision of center staff
- coordination of center volunteers
- facilitation of mentoring programs
3.   Are there obstacles that prevent achievement of your center mission?
4.   Please describe regular assessment activities that take place in the center, as well as any major assessments that have taken place in the last 3 years
5.   Are any of the following documents available for review? Whom to contact to obtain?
- Center mission
- Center annual reports
- Center staff position descriptions (professional and student staff)
- Center budget allocations
- Policy recommendations
- Center website
- Institutional website

458

- internal/external CAS reports
- center assessment results and/or reports
- Organizational structure chart
- Institutional non-discrimination statement that includes sexual orientation and gender identity

6.   Are courses offered at the institution that focus on LGBT identity or issues through a disciplinary lens?

7.   If so, are such courses associated with the Center? How?

8.   Do center staff members teach courses? If so, list: (department, course name, level, institutional purpose)

9.   Does the center conduct research? If so, describe.

10.   Do faculty conduct research related to the center? If so, describe.

11.   Would you be willing to share a list of your publications, presentations and professional activities or a recent copy of your CV/resume. If so, attach.

12.   Would you be willing to explore the option of hosting a focused research visit that would explore the essential value of your LGBT resource center. In particular, the study will consider the ways that centers: conceptualize, operationalize, and achieve their mission and purposes; meet objectives around advocacy and empowerment of students; create counterspaces that facilitate authentic self-expression and mitigate experiences of microaggression; and align center activities with the core instructional and research activities of their institutions? This visit would include the administration and analysis of a comprehensive LGBT campus climate survey, and the researcher's observations, conclusions and recommendations would be made available to each participating host site. Yes, No, Maybe

13.   Additional comments

Demographics

14.   Year of center establishment: 1971 − 1975, 1976-1980, 1981-1985, 1986-1990, 1991-1995, 1996-2000, 2001-2005, 2006-2010, 2010-present

15.   Total student enrollment (both undergraduate and graduate students):

16.   Institution type: Public, private not for profit, private for profit

17.   Institution highest degree awarded: Associates, Bachelors, Master's, Doctoral

18.   State

19.   Institution

Please provide your direct contact information, especially if you indicated a willingness to serve as a site for a focused research visit.

20.   Name

21.   Position

22.   Email

23.   Phone

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW OUTLINE FOR CENTER STAFF

1.   What is the campus climate like for LGBT people at YOUR INSTITUTION?
2.   In the survey that asks questions about campus climate, some of the questions were getting at students' experience of microaggressions, or everyday indignities or demeaning experiences that target LGBT people (as well as those in other underrepresented groups). As you interact with LGBT students, can you talk about how they experience microaggressions at YOUR INSTITUTION?
3.   Where do they encounter microaggressions the most at YOUR INSTITUTION?
4.   Where do they go on campus where they can let their guard down and be themselves or express themselves authentically?
5.   Thinking of the Center and its activities, how do you prepare students to manage the climate for LGBT students at YOUR INSTITUTION?
6.   Again, thinking about the Center, how do you prepare students to manage microaggressions?
7.   How does the Center help students to cope with the pressures or stresses associated with their experience of microaggressions?
8.   Are there other or additional supports on campus that also help them cope?
9.   How does the staff of the center advocate for students?
10.   Who are the center's strongest institutional allies?
11.   What (or who) are the center's strongest institutional obstacles?
12.   How does the staff of the center serve to empower students?
13.   Do you think students see these advocacy and empowerment efforts, or are they more behind the scenes?
14.   Are there ways in which the LGBT Resource Center contributes to the core instructional mission of the institution?
15.   Can you describe any collaborations between faculty and LGBT Resource Center staff?
16.   Is the center central to any research that is taking place at YOUR INSTITUTION?
17.   How is the Center essential to the success of YOUR INSTITUTION?
18.   Are there ways in which the Center might be viewed as vulnerable?
19.   Is this different than the ways in which other culture centers (such as ???) contribute to the instructional or research mission of the institution?
20.   Do you have any questions for me?
21.   Would you mind if I follow-up with you if I need clarification of have additional questions?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW OUTLINE FOR UNIT SUPERVISORS

1.   Can you share your experience with the center, and some of the successes and challenges you've experienced in overseeing the unit?
2.   Who are the center's strongest institutional allies?
3.   At YOUR INSTITUTION, where are the sites of resistance to LGBT acceptance?
4.   How does the staff of the center advocate for students?
5.   How does the staff of the center serve to empower students?
6.   Do you think students see these advocacy and empowerment efforts, or are they more behind the scenes?
7.   Which of the following center activities are most important to meeting the mission and purposes of the center?
•   crisis intervention
•   course instruction
•   student organization advising
•   coordination of LGBT speakers, trainers and performers
•   consultation services with students
•   consultation services with faculty
•   consultation services with staff
•   consultation services with others
•   facilitation of campus discussion groups about identity and experience
•   facilitation of campus discussion groups about LGBT people, social justice and social change
•   assessment
•   research
•   community service and civic engagement
•   communications include website and social media management
•   library services, including coordination with campus libraries
•   maintenance of library materials within the center itself
•   informal interaction with center-associated students
•   leadership development
•   alumni outreach
•   fundraising or development activities
•   supervision of center staff
•   coordination of center volunteers
•   facilitation of mentoring programs
8.   Are there additional goals or purposes that you have for the center which it is unable to meet at this time?
9.   Are there institutional obstacles or barriers that prevent achievement of the center's mission or those additional goals?

10.   Are there ways in which the LGBT Resource Center contributes to the core instructional mission of the institution?

11.   Can you describe any collaborations between faculty and LGBT Resource Center staff?

12.   Is the center central to any research that is taking place at YOUR INSTITUTION?

13.   How is the Center essential to the success of YOUR INSTITUTION?

14.   Are there ways in which the Center might be viewed as vulnerable?

15.   Is this different than the ways in which other culture centers (such as ???) contribute to the instructional or research mission of the institution?

16.   Do you have any questions for me?

17.   Would you mind if I follow-up with you if I need clarification of have additional questions?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW OUTLINE FOR PROVOST/REPRESENTATIVE

1. What is the campus climate like for LGBT people at YOUR INSTITUTION?
2. Can you share your experience with the center
3. Can you describe any successes and challenges you've been aware of in observing the center and its activities?
4. Are there ways in which the LGBT Resource Center contributes to the core instructional mission of the institution?
5. Can you describe any collaborations between faculty and LGBT Resource Center staff?
6. Is the center central to any research that is taking place at YOUR INSTITUTION?
7. How is the Center essential to the success of YOUR INSTITUTION?
8. Are there ways in which the Center might be viewed as vulnerable?
9. Is this different than the ways in which other culture centers (such as ???) contribute to the instructional or research mission of the institution?
10. Do you have any questions for me?
11. Would you mind if I follow-up with you if I need clarification of have additional questions?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW OUTLINE FOR STUDENTS

1.   What is the campus climate like for LGBT people at YOUR INSTITUTION?
2.   What positive experiences have you had as an LGBT person here?
3.   What negative experiences have you had as an LGBT person here?
4.   When you need help or support at YOUR INSTITUTION, where do you turn?
5.   Can you describe for me your sexual orientation and gender identity
6.   Do you feel that your identity is represented by the mission of the LGBT Resource Center.
7.   Can you describe ways that you have or have not felt included or supported in your identity by the Center?
8.   In the survey that asks questions about campus climate, some of the questions were getting at students' experience of microaggressions, or everyday indignities or demeaning experiences that target LGBT people (as well as those in other underrepresented groups). Have you experienced microaggressions at YOUR INSTITUTION?
9.   Where do you encounter microaggressions the most at YOUR INSTITUTION?
10.   Where on campus do you feel you have to be reserved with your identity-expression? Can you explain why you feel this way?
11.   Where do you go on campus where you can let your guard down and be yourself or express these identities?
12.   How are your experiences with microaggressions similar to or different than what you may have experienced previously, in high school, for example?
13.   Thinking of your involvement in the Center and its activities, can you point to anything you've learned that has helped prepare you to manage the climate for LGBT students at YOUR INSTITUTION?
14.   Again, thinking about the Center, have you gained any knowledge or skills through your involvement that has prepared you to manage microaggressions?
15.   Have you experienced a time when a staff member advocated on your behalf with someone else at the institution, or empowered you to take action on behalf of yourself?
16.   How does the Center help you to cope with the pressures or stresses associated with your experience of microaggressions?
17.   Are there other or additional supports on campus that also help you cope?
18.   Do you have any questions for me?
19.   Would you mind if I follow-up with you if I need clarification of have additional questions?